

THE VINE, THE OLIVE TREE, AND THE FIG TREE

On the third day of creation, - after He had made the heaven and the earth, the light and the darkness, and divided the waters from the firmament, - **Gen. 1:9** God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. **10** And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good. **11** And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and *the fruit tree* yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. **12** And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and *the tree yielding fruit*, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. ... The tree was one of the first features God created, and something as ordinary and familiar as trees feature many times throughout Scripture, often with a secondary application.

The Jews understood this, and they have an annual festival, on the 15th of Shevat, known as *Tu B'Shvat, The New Year for Trees* (11th February, 2017). The Festival of Trees refers to three trees which have historical and Biblical significance for the nation of Israel. ... They are the vine tree, the olive tree, and the fig tree.

In the Old Testament, **the Vine** tree is the symbol of humility and servant-hood, for example, **Songs 1:6** Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards ... Being the keeper of the vineyards was one of the lowliest of jobs, - she was made to look after the vineyards of her brothers because she was considered good for nothing else.

And God therefore, - because it was such a humble livelihood, - applied the symbolism of the vine to impoverished and destitute Israel, **Is. 3:14** The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof: for ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. **15** What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts. ... The Lord had taken pity on His people because the enemy had ravaged their way through the nation, and left them poor and in pieces, and God was calling the enemy to account. He called Israel, My *people* ... God's vineyard whom He had taken out of Egypt and planted in Canaan, as the Psalmist acknowledged, **Ps. 80:8** Thou hast brought *a vine* out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted *it*. **9** Thou preparedst room before *it*, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. ... The root is so deep, - planted by God, - it can never be removed from the land, and ultimately it will fill it!

And when the vine tree grows, ... ¹⁰ The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. ¹¹ She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river. ... But because the nation had abandoned God, He took their defences away and their future looked uncertain, and they cried, ¹² Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? ¹³ The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it

However, the faithful understood how Jehovah was justified in judging the nation for their sin ... and they appealed to Him, ¹⁴ Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; ¹⁵ And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. ... And, they believed God would answer for He had promised Moses concerning a day when ... **Dt. 11:24** Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be. [**Gen. 15:18** In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates ...] ²⁵ There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the LORD your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you. ... Those are the promises God made to Israel, the nation and its people. They are His beloved *vine*, deeply rooted in the land God had given them (Ps. 80:9) ... the vine which He grew from out of His sovereign choice.

... And Jesus applied the symbol of the vine to Himself, **Jn. 15:1** I am the true vine ... He is the epitome of humility and servant-hood, as described by Isaiah, **Is. 53:2** For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him ... ¹¹ He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall *my righteous servant* justify many ... Jesus, the Vine ... and the vine is the symbol of the servanthood of Israel, **Is. 5:7** For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant.

The Vine ... The Olive. Jeremiah reminded the people of God's goodness in setting them apart from the other nations. Yet, even with such blessings, **Jer. 11:10** They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers. ¹¹ Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them. ¹² Then shall the cities of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem go, and cry unto the gods unto

whom they offer incense: but they shall not save them at all in the time of their trouble. **13** For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal. **14** Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble. **15** What hath my beloved to do in mine house, seeing she hath wrought lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from thee? when thou doest evil, then thou rejoicest. **16** *The LORD called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit ...*

The green olive tree was of good fruit ... and different from all the rest, - that is how the Lord intended His people of Israel to be, as David described, **Ps. 52:8** *But [... in contrast to the goddess, v.1-7] I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever. **9** I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints. ...* However, as time elapsed, they exchanged the things of God for the things of idols, and consequently, the Lord judged them, **Jer. 11:16** *The LORD called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he hath kindled fire upon it, and the branches of it are broken. **17** For the LORD of hosts, that planted thee, hath pronounced evil against thee, for the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves to provoke me to anger in offering incense unto Baal.*

They had departed from God, to serve *other* gods, and, - centuries later, - this resulted in them not being able to recognise the Messiah, - Jesus, - when He came ... Indeed, this blindness continues to this very day for they still reject Him as the Messiah, the Saviour. However, despite all the promises and all the descriptions in the Old Testament, they remain *blind* to God's Son, **Rom. 11:8** *According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear; unto this day. ...* God still loves them, - He has never rejected them, neither have they stopped being His ancient people, He has *caused* them to take deep root (Ps. 80:9), - but the green olive tree has 'wilted', - it is not dead, because its roots run deep ... but it nevertheless is in a serious state of spiritual degeneration. ...

Does that mean God has nothing more to do with them (in a particular sense), and He has rescinded on His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... does it mean He has re-written those unconditional covenants, and the original recipients, - who were the olive tree, Israel, - have been removed or replaced? No, it does not mean anything of the kind ... because the roots of Israel *remain*

deeply in the ground of God's grace, as He promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, **Rom. 11:28** as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

And also, notice how only 'some' of the branches will be broken off, - not *all* (Rom. 11:17) ... It is like when we see the dead branches on a tree in our garden, - we cut them off and throw them away so that new ones will grow. ... God has a promise and a future for the remaining branches of the olive tree, and those which will sprout from them ... And also, His plan, - not an after-thought, but He planned it in eternity, - ... His plan involved 'cutting off' branches from another outside foreign wild olive tree, and carefully grafting them into His original olive tree, who is Israel, **17** And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree ...

You see, there is nothing wrong with the 'roots' of the 'olive tree' because the 'roots' are the covenants God originally made with Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph ... And, just in case those from the 'wild olive tree' might elevate themselves to thinking God has no longer any commitment to the original olive tree, here is a warning they need to remember concerning His original covenant with national Israel, **18** Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. **19** Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. **20** Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: **21** For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

It goes against every tenet of Biblical doctrine for any believer to consider God has finished with Israel because of the sins they committed, - that is an Arminian theology. ... Arminianism teaches you can be saved today and lost tomorrow if you don't keep yourself perfect. ... If that were the case, God would have finished with all of us a long time ago for our salvation depends not upon our abilities, but upon His grace ... and that is the covenant saving grace He first gave to Israel, - the covenant remains, not because Israel is worthy, but the covenant remains because the Lord was its sole signatory ... and therefore, the keeping of it remains with Him, **23** And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in *again*. **24** For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into *their own* olive tree? ... And, along these same lines, Paul explained to the Ephesians, **Eph. 2:12** That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: **13** But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far

off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us ... ¹⁹ Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God ... and since God has blessed us with such favour, Micah describes how ... **Micah 4:4** they [both Jews and Gentiles, separated unto God through Christ] shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.

It's decided! God has decreed it ... It is the story of God's grace towards the nation of Israel ... **the vine and the olive tree** ... and thirdly, **the fig tree**.

King Solomon wrote, **Prov. 27:18** Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured. ... Using the Hebrew poetic principle of 'parallelism', keepeth = waiteth on ... the fig tree = his master ... eat the fruit thereof = be honoured ... The fig tree is symbolic of the Master, Who is God.

Fig trees, though, can either bear good fruit or bad ... Hosea explains, **Hosea 9:10** I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baalpeor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved. And Jeremiah used the symbolism of the fig trees more specifically to relate to the governors of Israel, **Jer. 24:1** The LORD shewed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the LORD, after that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon. ² One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe: and the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad. ³ Then said the LORD unto me, What seest thou, Jeremiah? And I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the evil, very evil, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. ⁴ Again the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, ⁵ Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. ⁶ For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. ⁷ And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. ⁸ And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt: ⁹ And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. ¹⁰ And I will send the sword,

the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers. ...

In the New Testament, Jesus took this same symbolism, - of the fig tree, - and used it on the Mount of Olives to answer His disciples who had asked Him the threefold question, **Mt. 24:3** Tell us, when shall these things be [*concerning the Second Coming*]? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? ... He answered them in detail, and then summarised, **32** Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer [*or, 'summer fruit'*] is nigh: **33** So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. **34** Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. ... He was explaining to them that when the nation of Israel begins to 'grow again', when the roots so deeply embedded in the ground begin to sprout again ... with Israel resettled in their own land again, with their own government in their own ancient city, in the same geographical location as before, when God first gave them the land, - know that it [*the end, v.30,31*] is near, even at the doors. ... It's a sign when these things are happening, it's soon that Christ will return!

Specifically, Luke adds, **Lk. 21:29** And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; ... Now, the 'fig tree' is presented as being *apart from*, - outside, - all the other 'trees' ... and since the 'fig tree' refers to the nation and people of Israel, 'all the trees' similarly must refer to the other outside and foreign non-Israeli nations and people, - the Gentile nations, **30** When they now shoot forth, - ... and that is an interesting prophecy ... It could mean they might shoot forth as a body of united Gentile nations, or it could equally, - and perhaps more possibly, - it might mean *individual* nations *will* independently promote themselves to 'shoot forth', and expand, - ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. **31** So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. **32** Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.

This means that as time elapses at this stage of the world's existence, nations may exert and exercise their own nationalist identity, rather than be suppressed under a global international authoritative confederacy. For example, they will increasingly resent any overarching unifying structure such as the European Union or the United Nations, and they will want to concentrate on their own individual progress. ... In other words, not only the United Kingdom will want to reclaim its sovereignty ... and 'shoot forth' by itself and on its own ... but others will want to as well, and for a time, 'all the trees will be shooting forth'.

... And when you start to see that happening, - said Jesus, - **Lk. 21:31** *know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. ... He's coming back!*

As far as the 'fig tree', - Israel (... and that is the one we particularly take note of), - is concerned, in accordance with God's covenant, it *was* replanted in their own land in 1948, - it is there at this very moment, and there is no sign of it being uprooted again, in fact, quite the contrary! It is a physical, geographical, and political nation once again, with its own capital ... and it happened not by political accident, but by a fulfilment of Biblical prophecy. ... That being the case, there is more yet to come, **Lk. 21:29** *Behold the fig tree, and all the trees;* **30** *When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.*

So, you see, the Jewish calendar is not simply an annual time-keeper, but it is prophetic. We have seven days in the week, - as instituted by the Jewish Scriptures. We have days, and weeks, and months, and years ... as established in God's Word, given to His ancient people. ... And God has used this same Jewish calendar for more than simply time-keeping for He has used it throughout the history of Israel to demonstrate He has everything set to a time, **Eccles. 3:1** *To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven*

Therefore, we can have confidence in what it says about the preparations so we are ready when Jesus returns. He speaks using everyday emblems, familiar to the Jewish nation, - the vine tree, the olive tree, and the fig tree. He does not complicate it or hide it in strange symbolic puzzles which only nurtures confusion and unbelief ... but He keeps it simple ... so simple that an old man like Simeon, and an old woman like Anna could understand (Lk. 2:25ff.) ... He means what He says in His Word, and He says what He means ... and He wants His people to understand, so they can discern the signs of the times and be living in the daily expectation of the Saviour's return, as the Scriptures say, *until He come* (I Cor. 11:26). Amen.