

SOME TREES OF THE BIBLE

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1. THE OLIVE TREE

The first and last references to the olive tree

The first reference to the olive tree is in the time of Noah and the flood. The ark had eventually come to rest on the mountains of Ararat and the waters of the flood decreased continually (Gen. 8:4-5). At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark and sent forth a raven. Being an unclean bird it never returned, no doubt resting and feeding upon the carcasses floating in the water.

It is with the dove that we are more concerned. It was a clean bird and after being sent out the first time it returned again, not finding any place for the sole of her foot. However, the second time it was sent out it came back with the evidence of dry land, and we quote, "And he stayed yet other seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark: And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf, pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth" (Gen. 8:10-11).

There is a lot more to learn from this incident, but we will leave it here for the moment and emphasise the fact that the olive leaf was a sure witness to Noah that the flood had subsided.

The last mention of the olive tree in the Scriptures is just as interesting and yields very much the same truth. The setting is the "end of the age". The church has been removed. They are fearful days, and two witnesses come before us surrounded by violent opposition. We believe they are a part of the godly Jewish remnant of which we read so much in the Psalms. These two witnesses are also said to be, "The two olive trees and the two lamps (or light bearers) which stand before the Lord of the earth" (Rev. 11:4, J.N.D. Translation). It is not

difficult to see the connection — “two witnesses”, “two olive trees”, and “two lamps”.

Even the thought of their being two goes to confirm our conclusion. What a wonderful example they are to any who would desire to be witnesses in our day. The very Greek word for witnesses in Revelation 11:3 is the word from which we derive our word martyr. They are martyrs and they lose their lives for the Lord's sake. We are told that they bore witness for “a thousand two hundred and threescore days” (Rev. 11:3). It is the period of “Jacob's trouble”, which is three and a half years, but the Lord's interest in and care for His servants is not reckoned in years but in days (Jer. 30:7).

Power for Witness

Having considered the first and last references to the olive tree in the Scriptures, we have concluded that the outstanding feature connected with it is witness.

Those acquainted with the Old Testament will know that the imagery of Revelation 11:4 is derived from Zechariah 4. The figure of a candlestick is prominent in that chapter. It is a little different from the candlestick in the tabernacle with which we are more familiar. “And the angel that talked with me came again... And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof; And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof” (Zech. 4:1-3).

The prophet seems to have been at a loss as to what it all meant. He asks, “What are these, my lord?” In verse 6 the meaning of the vision is given, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts” (J.N.D.). The meaning of the vision pointed to the Holy Spirit as the only power for witness and work for God. A feeble remnant had returned from captivity in Babylon to build the temple. They were concerned

about the worship of Jehovah and so the first thing they did was to set the altar upon its basis (Ezra 3:3). They put first things first. Service God-ward must precede every other form of service. The work of building was difficult and there were many enemies. It was a day of small things and they had little strength, but God's power was available to them. The vision was for the encouragement of Zerubbabel and his fellow-builders.

It is recorded in Ezra how the work came to a halt and the builders became discouraged. It was only through the labours of the prophet Haggai that the work was started again. His message was very much in line with the vision in Zechariah 4. "The word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, and My Spirit, remain among you: fear ye not" (Haggai 2:5, J.N.D.). We can follow the example of this remnant. There is much to be done and there are many discouragements, but if we confess our weakness we will find our strength in looking to the Lord and depending upon the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Two Anointed Ones

What we have considered so far in Zechariah 4 relates to the circumstances of the returned remnant and was for their encouragement at that time. However, in the closing verses of the chapter the focus of attention is upon the two olive trees, one on each side of the candlestick.

Although Zerubbabel is mentioned by name, we must not forget Joshua. Both were instrumental in furthering the building of the temple. Zerubbabel was the Governor and Joshua was the High Priest. Taken together they give us a prophetic picture of the coming rule of the great King-Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is referred to in chapter 6:13, "... and He shall be a priest upon His throne". We quote verses 12 and 14 of Zechariah 4 here, "And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches, which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? Then

said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth”.

In the day envisaged here there will be a perfect witness through Israel to the Gentile nations. In Old Testament times God raised up Israel to be a testimony against the idolatry of the surrounding nations. Sadly they failed, turning to idolatry themselves. The vision seen by the prophet looks on to the time when Israel will be a means of blessing to the Gentiles.

The oil required for this flows from the two olive trees via the two branches that empty the golden oil out of themselves. As we have already mentioned, the two olive trees, pointing to Zerubbabel and Joshua at the time of the remnant, now combine in Christ, the “priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Psalm 110:4).

The many references to gold in this chapter arrest the attention. The candlestick itself is “all of gold” (v. 2), the pipes are gold (v. 12), and even the oil is described as “golden oil” (v. 12). This teaches us that there will be an administration supported by divine power.

Pure Oil of Beaten Olives for the Light

“And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always” (Ex. 27:20). In Zechariah 4 the emphasis is upon the two olive trees. We have mentioned their typical significance. “These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth” (v. 14).

We will now consider the golden lampstand in the tabernacle in the wilderness. The lampstand itself is a striking type of Christ, not as the “light of the world”, but as the One who gives light inside, in the holy place where the priests went about their service. It is the “olive oil” that is the means whereby the lamps were to be kept burning. This is the well known figure of the Spirit of God in the Scriptures.

We might ask, "What was the real reason for the light?" No doubt it gave light in the holy place, but there was another reason! In Exodus 25:37 we read, "And thou shalt make the seven lamps thereof; and they shall light the lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it". This is further confirmed in Numbers 8:2. It seems that the chief purpose of the light was to shine upon the lampstand itself, showing its beauty and remarkable handiwork. Although no dimensions are given, we read that it was made of beaten work from a talent of pure gold (Ex. 25:31, 39). That almonds were part of the design, may speak typically of Christ in resurrection (Ex. 25:33-34; Num. 17).

It makes an interesting study to keep what is said about the tabernacle furniture in mind when reading the Gospel of John. The lampstand finds its antitype in chapter 16. Speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit in verse 14 the Lord said, "He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you". We are not to hinder the work of the Spirit within; He is always ready to direct us to the Lord Jesus. It is when our hearts are occupied with Him that we are changed into His likeness (2 Cor. 3:18).

The Holy Anointing Oil

"Moreover, the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels, and of cassia five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil olive an hin:... it shall be an holy anointing oil" (Ex. 30:22-25).

More is said concerning the anointing oil than the oil for the light. In the verses following those quoted above an account is given of how the whole tabernacle and all its vessels were anointed. Also Aaron and his sons were anointed to consecrate them in the priest's office. It is the typical teaching in all this which makes it of such value to us, being, as we have already pointed out, the type of the Holy Spirit.

It had its place in the meal offering, which was in certain cases anointed with oil, speaking so clearly of the beginning of the Lord's public ministry when He was baptised at Jordan. This is spoken of by Peter in his address in the house of Cornelius, "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). As we think of His priesthood today, Hebrews 1:9, quoted from Psalm 45, comes to mind, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hast hated lawlessness; therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with oil of gladness above Thy companions".

Principal Spices

While oil olive clearly formed the basis of the holy anointing oil, the spices speak to us of the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9; 1 Pet. 1:11). Many attempts have been made to identify these spices, and to give them a typical meaning. We can all give our hearty assent to the fact that they speak of the graces and the moral beauties of the Saviour.

The inclusion of the myrrh definitely speaks of His sufferings, of which we so much love to sing, "Love that on death's vale its sweetest odours spread". As we have been anointed as a family of priests, may something of these graces be seen in our lives and service too.

A Land of Oil Olive

"For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey" (Deut. 8:7-8).

God brought His people Israel out of Egypt, in order to bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey. Between Egypt and the Land they were led through the wilderness in

order to be tested. The wilderness did not form part of God's purpose for them; Canaan was the land of promise. The early part of this chapter describes how God cared for His people in the wilderness. He fed them with manna that they might know that, "man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). The passage at the beginning of this section refers to Canaan with all its resources. There was no shortage there — all they required was available in abundance. These verses give a glowing picture of that land. Limiting ourselves to the particular subject of our present study, we are told that the good land was a "land of oil olive". This feature was a necessary element of the richness of the land, and could not be done without.

The believer today experiences wilderness conditions, for this is what the world has become to us. Our dependence upon God is often put to the test, but there is always ample grace for us to draw upon. In our Christian experience we may also know what answers spiritually to the land of Canaan. This land was on the other side of the river Jordan, which is a figure of death. To the believer today Jordan does not speak of physical death, but of our death with Christ. The land is ours because He has been raised from among the dead and because we are risen with Him. To Israel Canaan was a material land of delights, but to the Christian it is spiritual.

Returning to our theme of oil olive as speaking of the Holy Spirit, our blessings are heavenly and spiritual: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). This is an apt description of our heavenly Canaan. The wealth of this heavenly land is all ours in title. When Israel crossed over Jordan they were to possess the land of Canaan. This meant warfare with the nations who opposed them. So it is with us in our days — we must possess our possessions.

There are enemies who are set against the Christian. They are not flesh and blood, but spiritual. Ephesians 6 speaks of this conflict and the armour which is to be put on, so that we might stand and repel the foe. If Canaan is described as “a land of oil olive”, speaking typically of spiritual things, then we also need the help of the Holy Spirit in order to take possession of what God has given us.

In the Apostle’s prayer in Ephesians 3 we see how this works out in present enjoyment: “... strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge...” (vv. 16-19). The latter part of the Epistle speaks much of our walk, that is practical conduct which is in keeping with our high calling.

The Olive Tree and its Fatness

“But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?” (Judg. 9:9).

It is not difficult to make the transition from the subject of the enjoyment of our spiritual blessings to that of fatness. This would point to prosperity, not in natural things but rather in spiritual things. The apostle John in his 3rd Epistle refers to this when he writes to his well-beloved Gaius: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John v. 2). Perhaps this brother did not enjoy good health, but it was an excellent commendation that he was spiritually healthy.

A Green Olive Tree

“Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. But I am like a green olive tree in the

house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever” (Psa. 52:7-8).

In contrast to the man who put his trust in riches, David could speak of himself as a green olive tree. There was no sign of being dried up and withered but rather the evidence of sap and vitality. David wrote this Psalm at a time of severe testing. There was an enemy in the camp. The secret of his strength lay in his trust in the mercy of God.

The reference to the house of God is very interesting, because in Psalm 36:8 fatness is connected with it. “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures”.

When David became king it was his longing desire to “... find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob” (Psa. 132:5). So it was that the ark, the symbol of God’s presence, came to Zion with great rejoicing. However, David was never satisfied until a permanent house was built for the ark. In 2 Samuel 7:2 we read, “That the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains”. It was Solomon, David’s son, who built the temple, into which the ark was taken to abide there.

This was another reason for great rejoicing, although David did not live to see it happen. God’s presence among His people meant there was great prosperity and blessing, not only in material things but in a spiritual way too. As quoted in the above Psalm, there was to be abundant satisfaction and fatness.

In the present Christian era the house of God is not a material structure like Solomon’s temple. Rather, it is formed of true believers who as “living stones, are being built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5, J.N.D.). It is there that the holy priesthood offer up their spiritual sacrifices to God. It is also there that abundant provision is made for all who will avail themselves of it. There is no lack of good spiritual food provided

by ministry and it is also the place of prayer. We should not be lax in our attendance at the gatherings of the saints, because it is there that real satisfaction and fatness will be found. If we desire to grow as believers we must be where the food is available.

A Wild Olive Tree — A Good Olive Tree

“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”; “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” (Rom. 11:17, 24).

The two verses form part of a parenthetical portion of Romans 11. In it Paul gives an illustration of the basic teaching of the chapter and uses an allegory of the olive tree to do so. If God in His ways has for the moment turned away from Israel because of their unbelief, in no way does this mean that His promises to them will not be fulfilled.

God in His mercy has turned to the Gentiles in blessing, but with regard to Israel Paul writes, “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (v. 29). It has come out in our study very clearly that the olive tree speaks of witness. Israel was taken up to be a witness to the Gentiles, the root of the nation of Israel being Abraham.

We know that Abraham was characterised by faith. Israel is the good olive tree, but because of the unfaithfulness of the people some of the branches were broken off. The Gentiles, described as the wild olive tree, were grafted in instead. The line of testimony was put into the hands of the Christian profession, but there is no place for boasting.

Paul gives very solemn warnings. We quote part of the section. “Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The

branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off; and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear; For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee” (Rom. 11:18-21).

It should be said that we are not speaking about the true Church here, but rather the Christian profession. There can never be any thought of cutting off with regard to the Church of God. Everyone who is truly in the Church is real. At the same time the warnings are not to be neglected, since we all belong to the Christian profession and taken as a whole this has not continued in God’s goodness. The day will come when the true Church of God will be taken to be with the Lord at the rapture and what is left will be cut off. The natural branches will be grafted into their own olive tree. Israel will once again occupy the place of testimony for God in the world.

Following the allegory of the olive tree the apostle returns in verse 25 to the main subject of the chapter. He writes, “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom. 11:25-26).

The fulness of the Gentiles points to the rapture of the Church, which closes the present dispensational parenthesis. As these verses say, God will take up Israel again and all that has been promised them will be theirs. As the chapter goes on it is seen that only sovereign mercy will meet their case, as that of the Gentiles also. “For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all” (v. 32).

Olive Plants Round About Thy Table

“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table” (Psa.

128:3). This verse gives us a beautiful picture of family life as God meant it to be. The outstanding feature of the vine is fruitfulness. The children being like olive plants would speak of prosperity and contentment. The table speaks of fellowship. These features should be found in a well-ordered home.

Making a spiritual application of the verse to the church, we note that it is in 1 John that the saints are looked at as a family, with all the affections proper to it. They are seen as having been born of God, in possession of the same life, and bonded together in new relationships. In verse 3 of chapter 1 we have a fellowship outside of the world altogether, "... truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ".

Further on in verse 7 the apostle writes of "fellowship one with another", the basis of this being "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son (which) cleanseth us from all sin". The fellowship here is not ecclesiastical. It is a bond of life which binds every saint into one family. As we come into contact with the saints, may this fellowship be real to us. We need it in a hostile world.

2. THE FIG TREE

The first mention of the fig

The first mention of the fig is in Genesis 3:7, “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons”.

This forms part of the sad history of the fall of man. The guilty pair had given ear to the words of the serpent and disobeyed God’s word. Satan had suggested that God was holding back from them what would be to their advantage. “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). When they fell they were given a conscience and the knowledge of good and evil, but had not the power to do the good or to avoid the evil.

The aprons of fig leaves were an attempt to cover their nakedness, but when God came into the garden their guilty consciences made them hide themselves because they knew that they were naked. God gave them other clothing; not fig leaves but coats of skins, no doubt as the result of sacrifice.

We might be wondering what this has to do with Israel’s history as unfolded in the Scriptures. Turning to the Epistle to the Romans we quote from chapter 10 where Paul expresses his heart’s yearning for them. “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record, that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:1-3).

It is not difficult to see the connection between this passage and that in Genesis. The passage from Romans is part of Paul's argument that, even though the Gentiles have been brought into blessing through the gospel, all is secure as far as Israel's ultimate salvation is concerned. Chapter 9 of Romans teaches us that "the purpose of God, according to election" (v. 11), must stand. Chapter 11 assures us that all must be accomplished, for "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (v. 29).

Between these two chapters comes chapter 10 where he looks at God's earthly people in their responsibility and is deeply affected by their national failure. If we consider the words, "going about to establish their own righteousness", we see the fig leaves of Genesis 3. And the words, "have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God", point to the need of the coats of skin.

The righteousness of God is His consistency with Himself in justifying the sinner by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. This made nothing of them. It became a stumbling block and they rejected it as they had already rejected their Messiah and crucified Him. However, a door of mercy stood open for all who would flee to it for refuge. Many had done so, including Paul himself.

This was nothing new. At the time of the giving of the law at Sinai they said, "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8). Despite this confidence, they had no ability to fulfil their words. How good it is in our day to have learnt how profitless the flesh is, and to have found the work of Christ to be all-sufficient. We are thankful for the ability the Holy Spirit gives in order that we may live for the Lord Jesus Christ day by day.

A Nation Under Discipline

There can be little doubt, looking at the history of Israel as a nation, that they are a striking illustration of God's ways of discipline. We will trace this out in the Book of Jeremiah. In

chapter 24 we find reference made to two baskets of figs. "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" (Jer. 24:2).

Jeremiah lived in a very critical period in the history of Israel. He saw the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. This caused the prophet great distress of heart, which comes out in the book of Lamentations. Although Babylon was the nation used to inflict this tragic blow, it was God's act of judgment upon them because of their idolatry and gross unfaithfulness.

In connection with this it is of interest to note that God speaks of Nebuchadnezzar as My servant. It will be seen that God's ways are truly past finding out, whether it be among the nations or among His people today. Let us see what is said about the good figs. "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" (Jer. 24:5).

God looked favourably upon those who had already been taken into captivity by the Chaldeans and had not rebelled against it. It is very worthwhile noting the words, "for their good". Whatever God does in the way of discipline is for our profit. The lessons from the Book of Jeremiah are there for our learning today.

The chapter in the New Testament where the subject of discipline is prominent is Hebrews 12. The message is no different from that of Jeremiah. "Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness" (Heb. 12:9-10).

Jeremiah's message was that they should submit to the Chaldean armies. It was folly to resist the hand of God

exercised towards them for their good. The last king, Zedekiah, rebelled instead of hearkening to the words of the prophet. Jeremiah was regarded by the king and the leaders of the nation as unpatriotic and a traitor because of his advice. But it was God's own word that they disregarded. Jeremiah repeatedly used the words, "Thus saith the LORD".

He suffered very severely for his faithfulness, on one occasion almost losing his life. He even had a secret meeting with the king in which he told him the right course to take. "Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand" (Jer. 38:17-18).

The naughty figs

This brings us to the naughty figs; indeed they are described as evil figs. Many of the children of Israel were not prepared to obey God's voice to them, and destruction quickly followed. Zedekiah came to a humiliating end. His eyes were put out and he was bound with chains and taken to Babylon. Remembering what we have said about God's ways of discipline always being for our good, another verse comes to mind: "The anger of the LORD shall not return, until He have executed, and till He have performed the thoughts of His heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly" (Jer. 23:20).

It may be surprising to read of the heart in the context of the anger of the Lord being executed, but have we not often heard that there is a heart behind the hand? The above verse teaches this. It also tells us that in the latter days Israel will look back and understand the ways of God with them, particularly His love for them.

The New Testament teaches the same with regard to discipline, "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). Indeed, chastening is the proof of our relationship as sons. One day we too will look back over God's ways of discipline with us and say, "I'll bless the hand that guided, I'll bless the heart that planned". Again to quote from Hebrews 12, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (v. 11).

Under the Fig Tree

"Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto Him, Whence knowest Thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee" (John 1:47-48). The closing verses of John 1 have a dispensational character. The interview between the Lord Jesus and Nathanael is said to have taken place on "The day following" (v. 43).

We must enquire as to the events of the preceding day. In verse 29 we read, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world". This verse is very familiar to us all and refers to His death. Following this, John was given the sign that the One upon whom he saw the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, "the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost". This points on to Pentecost when the Holy Spirit actually came down.

In verse 35 similar words occur, "Again the next day". It is difficult to say whether this is the same day as that given in verse 29. The witness of the Baptist is not now to the Lord's work, but rather to His Person as an object of attraction. "And looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God" (v. 36). His witness was so powerful that two of his

disciples left him and followed Jesus. He became the object of their affections.

The next incident recorded is that of Andrew bringing his own brother, Simon, to Jesus, and we are told that the Lord said to him, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone" (v. 42). Here we have suggested the truth of the church made up of living stones. It is this truth that Peter opens up in his first epistle. What a remarkable grouping together of features of the present day are seen in this passage:

- (1) The Lord's work of redemption in its vast results.
- (2) The gift of the Holy Spirit.
- (3) Christ, the One to whom the Spirit directs our hearts.
- (4) The spiritual house, made of living stones.

We come now to "The day following" (v. 43). Jesus finds Philip and says to him, "Follow Me". He in turn finds Nathanael and tells him about Jesus, "We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (v. 45). This prompts the response from Nathanael, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip's answer was very brief and to the point, "Come and see".

The words of the Lord with regard to Nathanael's character are very beautiful, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" This may very well recall the Scripture from the Book of Judges, where the fig tree says, "Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit?" (Judg. 9:11). This is the fruit that God sought from Israel. Nathanael was surprised at the Lord's knowledge of him and His words, so full of meaning, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee".

The Jewish Remnant

It seems obvious that, “The day following”, of John 1:43 looks at God’s work in Israel. We must conclude that Nathanael is typical of Israel in the enjoyment of the promises in the day to come. Whether Nathanael was actually under the fig tree when Jesus saw him is difficult to say; it is the typical meaning which is so interesting. In the Old Testament Scriptures the expression, “under the fig tree”, represents the blessing of Israel in the kingdom. “But they 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” (Mic. 4:4; 1 Ki. 4:25; Zech. 3:10).

Nathanael’s response to the Lord’s words was spontaneous and amounted almost to worship. How rich it was in prophetic truth. “Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel”. Nathanael’s exclamation is very much in line with the content of Psalm 2, which is a Messianic psalm. Psalm 1 describes the features of the godly remnant, and Psalm 2 begins the Messianic strain. These themes go right through the Book of Psalms.

Psalm 2 is God’s answer to the counsel of the rulers “against the LORD, and against His Anointed” (v. 2). There was a partial fulfilment of this at the time of the Lord’s crucifixion (Acts 4:25-28), but the psalm will have its ultimate answer in the final revolt against God just prior to the setting up of the kingdom. He that sits in the heavens will laugh: “Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee” (Psa. 2:6-7).

The word “set” is really “anointed”, and man’s antagonism to God cannot thwart His purpose. How puny man is — all his efforts to dethrone God will come to nothing. The rightful king of Israel shall reign in Zion. Not only is He the Son, but He is spoken of as “My Son”, words addressed to Him as

coming into the world, yet at the same time not detracting from His eternal relationship as the Son.

It was a remarkable thing for Nathanael to realise how much the Lord knew about him, but He goes on to speak of greater things. "Verily, verily, I say to you, Henceforth ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man" (John 1:51, J.N.D.).

What are the greater things? There seems to be an advance in the presentation of the Person of Christ in Psalm 8, where He is set forth, not as king in Zion, but in a wider glory as the Son of man. The realm of the glory of Christ in Psalm 2 is on earth, but in Psalm 8 it is much greater and wider. The very first verse of Psalm 8 provides the key. "O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth! who hast set Thy glory above the heavens". The psalm goes on to say, "Thou hast put all things under His feet" (v. 6). While He is not seen publicly as yet, He is already on high as the Son of man. This is how Stephen saw Him as recorded in Acts 7. More than this, Stephen saw Him through opened heavens, the same expression as is used in verse 51 of John 1. It is true to faith today: "But now we see not yet all things subjected to Him, but we see Jesus, who was made some little inferior to angels on account of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; so that by the grace of God He should taste death for every thing" (Heb. 2:9, J.N.D.).

The fig tree in the Synoptic Gospels

"And He left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and He lodged there. Now in the morning as He returned into the city, He hungered. And when He saw a fig tree in the way, He came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!" (Matt. 21:17-20).

Chapter 21 begins the account of the last week of the Lord's life. It was obvious that the leaders of the nation were determined to have Him put to death. They were sore displeased when the children in the temple cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David". How deeply solemn are the words with which verse 17 begins, "And He left them". These were critical days for Israel as a nation. He lodged in Bethany where He was made welcome. In the morning He returned to the city and being hungry looked for the fruit that should have been on the fig tree but found only leaves. There was an outward show of religious observance, but it was lifeless.

The whole incident is figurative of the state of Israel at that time. It had become very obvious that He was rejected and the setting aside of the nation of Israel was at hand. This is what lay behind the Lord's severe words, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever". The disciples were taken aback by the swiftness with which the fig tree withered away.

The testimony of Mark as to this incident is very similar. However, in Luke's Gospel no account is given of this. Instead the Lord puts the truth in a parable. We will quote it all. "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down" (Luke 13:6-9).

Much has been written about the three years of this parable when fruit was sought. There had been three particular periods during which Israel had been put to the test: (1) under the law; (2) under the prophets; and now (3), in the presence of grace in the Person of Christ. At the very moment when He spoke this parable the leaders of the nation were plotting against His life.

How patient God was with His earthly people: "let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it". The early chapters of the Book of Acts tell the story of His patience with them. There was a response from the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, a remnant out of the nation. When it became evident that God was to turn to the Gentiles in blessing, the nation's antagonism was directed against the gospel. Things came to a head at the stoning of Stephen. We note Stephen's words, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51). The prophets had shown the coming of the Just One. The charge was laid at their door, "... of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers". How this echoes the words of the parable, "cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

We can learn much from God's dealings with His earthly people. Looking at the history of the church in responsibility we have nothing to boast about, for what a sad story it is! Owing to the patience of our God there have been occasions when truth has been revived, such as at the Reformation, and later when there was the restoration of the truth of the Headship of Christ and His body. But in spite of these there is a downward trend. The end is given us in the Lord's words to the church at Laodicea. "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth" (Rev. 3:16).

There is, however, that which remains and is unchanging. Christ remains unalterable in His Person and in His grace, and His word never changes. How thankful we ought to be that our God is a God of patience. "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6).

The Fig Tree in the Olivet Discourse

“Now learn a parable of the fig tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh” (Matt. 24:32; Mark 13:28).

The contrast is very evident between the references to the fig tree already observed in the early part of the Gospel, and those given here. It was seen in the first place as fruitless, cursed, and withered away. But here in these later Scriptures the fig tree is seen putting forth her leaves. This is the evidence that summer is near.

The time here described is the time of the great tribulation which will befall the Jewish nation after the rapture. A godly remnant will be tried and refined during those terrible times, and it is to such that these words of comfort are given. Just before the verse above, reference is made to “the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory” (v. 30). It is to this event that the godly company look for their redemption.

The fig tree putting forth her leaves means that God is about to deal with Israel again after the many centuries of their blindness. In the account given by Luke they are bidden to “look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28).

The Fig Tree and All the Trees

“And He spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand” (Luke 21:29-30).

There are differences in the way this subject is looked at in Luke’s Gospel. Luke takes more account of the immediate results of the rejection of Christ by Israel. The destruction of the city and temple by Titus in A.D.70 comes within his teaching.

The consequences of this have come right down the present age.

However, Luke does take us on to the end of the age beginning at verse 25, including the reference to "... the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (v. 27). Reference is made in Luke's account to the times of the Gentiles, which period continues at the present time. It will be seen from this that Luke looks at Israel's involvement with the Gentile powers down the ages, starting with Nebuchadnezzar.

In connection with this the passage quoted at the head of this section is seen to involve more than the fig tree; in fact, all the trees. This refers to Gentile nations. During the times of the Gentiles Israel is under their authority, but in the future day when Israel has been given the place rightly belonging to her as head among the nations, these others will be blessed along with her.

So starting with the fig tree (Israel) putting forth her leaves, all the trees (Gentile nations) will also have their proper place. These will be glad days for Israel. Looked at as the earthly bride she will rejoice: "The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away" (Song of Songs 2:13).

As we read those words addressed to an earthly people, how often we apply the sentiments to ourselves as the heavenly people, the bride of Christ. In an earlier verse in the above section of the Song of Songs (v. 10), it says "Rise up". The relevant expression with regard to the church is "caught up". For this we look with anticipation, waiting to hear the Lord's voice. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

A Practical Note

There is one point we have not referred to as yet with regard to the fig itself. It is used on one occasion for healing. When God had told His servant, the godly king Hezekiah, that he must set his house in order for he was to die, we remember how distressed he became. We read, "And Hezekiah wept sore". God listened to his prayer and saw his tears. Isaiah said, "Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered" (2 Ki. 20:7).

In the passage in Judges 9 we read, "The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them" (v. 8). The fig tree as well as the olive and the vine had no aspirations to be king. They preferred to remain as they were. The answer of the fig tree is worth repeating, "Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?"

We have noted that it was a lump of figs that gave healing and recovery to Hezekiah. The parable of Jotham may very well teach us that leadership is not necessarily the answer to the troubles among the saints. This has been proven in past times. As we think of goodness and sweetness, these are features that were seen in Christ. It may be that obscure believers, who are living near the Lord and display these traits, are better equipped to bring in healing and recovery among the saints. We recall the words of the Lord, "And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all" (Mark 10:44).

May the Lord bless these meditations on the fig tree, and may the various lessons learned stand us in good stead until we are bidden to rise and meet the Lord in the air.

3. THE VINE

'Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees' (Judg. 9:12,13).

Purpose of the vine

In the previous articles about the olive tree and the fig tree we started from the first mention of each of the trees. This time we will not follow that rule, but start from the book of Ezekiel. This may seem odd, but by so doing the essential truth connected with the vine will come to light. Quoting from Ezekiel 15 it will be seen that the vine is only of use for bearing fruit: 'Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to do any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned. Is it meet for any work?' (Ezek. 15:2-3).

There is no mention of fruit in the above passage, but the other Scriptures on the theme of the vine will show that fruit bearing is its purpose. We will look at some of these passages. The teaching connected with fruit bearing will show that it is for God. When it comes to the matter of works God should have his part. This is borne out by the Apostle Paul's prayer for the Colossians. 'That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, (bearing fruit in every good work, J.N.D.) and increasing in the knowledge of God' (Col. 1:10). Whoever it be that benefits from the good works, the fruit is for God's pleasure.

The Dream of Pharaoh's Butler

The first mention of the vine in scripture is in Genesis 40. It was while Joseph was in prison that the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord and were put in prison also. Joseph was there through no fault of his own. To put it into New Testament language, he was 'suffering for righteousness' sake'.

However, the Lord was with Joseph and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. He committed into his hand all the prisoners and whatsoever they did there he was the doer of it. Both these men, the butler and the baker, had dreams which they recounted to Joseph, but there was no interpreter. As we have noticed the Lord was with Joseph and he said, 'Do not interpretations belong to God?' (Gen. 40:8). He was able to give the meaning of the dreams to both of these servants of Pharaoh. It is the butler's dream which is important to our study. He was the cupbearer to Pharaoh.

'And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine was before me; and in the vine were three branches: and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes: and Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup'.

In every step of the life of the Son of God He glorified the Father, and it was also true in His death. In the passage above the grapes were pressed. We might very well think of the Lord's death and the awful pressure when being made sin. In Gethsemane it was suffering in anticipation. What can we say of the cross itself? Sinners have been accepted in virtue of that finished work which glorified God. The butler, as we see, was restored to his position again. We who were guilty are justified before God. If we wish to extend the type further, maybe the three branches would remind us of Christ's resurrection. Justification is in a risen Saviour. The dream of the baker tells

us that salvation is not of works; he was not restored to his position again, but was executed.

Israel as the Vine

There are many Scriptures which refer to Israel as the vine. Psalm 80 is one of them. It is an outstanding but sad story. 'Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river' (vv. 8-11).

The extent of the territory promised by God was reached in the days of Solomon, David's son. Israel achieved its greatest prosperity at that time. The verses quoted here make reference to the borders of the land. The sea refers to the Mediterranean, and the river refers to the Euphrates.

The question is then asked, 'Why hast thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it' (vv. 12,13). No actual reasons are given here for this. But it is very clear from many other Old Testament Scriptures why this was so. Reference is made here no doubt to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldean armies because of the unfaithfulness and idolatry of the nation. The faithful among them cry out in their distress, 'Return, we beseech thee, O God of Hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself' (vv. 14,15). Time and again the cry is made to God to return and visit the vine.

Psalm 80 is found in the third book of Psalms. The circumstances of the godly remnant are set in the days of the great tribulation. Immediate happenings may be in the mind of the psalmist, but in the main it is a future day. The branch

referred to in the verses quoted above is the royal house of David. Their only hope rests in the One referred to as the Son of Man. This is a familiar name throughout the Scriptures given to and used by the Lord Jesus concerning Himself.

‘Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself’ (v. 17). These are familiar words to Christians. It is our Saviour who is sitting today at the right hand of God. But another psalm tells of God’s address to Him: ‘The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool’ (Ps. 110:1). This is the person whom God will make strong for Himself, not only restoring the nation again as the vine bringing forth fruit for Himself, but delivering them from their enemies.

The Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts

Moving further on into the Old Testament, the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 5 refers again to the vine and also the vineyard. The language used by the prophet is very interesting, particularly when compared with the parable of the vineyard in the synoptic gospels. ‘My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill’ (Isa. 5:1). ‘Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son’ (Mark 12:6).

In Isaiah 5 the wellbeloved is very clearly Jehovah; it is His vineyard. In the parable in Mark’s gospel the one sent by the householder into the vineyard is his wellbeloved son. There is a remarkable testimony to the deity of Christ here. It has often been said that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Jesus of the New. There cannot be much doubt that the wellbeloved of the parable pointed to Christ, although He was the teller of the parable.

Coming back to the fifth chapter of Isaiah, the same sad story unfolds. In the vineyard God had planted the choicest vine. All had been done to obtain fruit, a winepress was put therein in order that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought

forth wild grapes. There was no fruit for God! 'What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?' (v. 4). Light is given as to the kind of fruit that God sought: 'He looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry'.

This passage in Isaiah 5 describes the sad results of the lack of fruitfulness. The hedge was taken away, the wall was broken down, it was laid waste, thorns and briars came up, and there was no rain upon it. Everything that God commits to men ends in failure. God had taken up one nation as a test case, providing every privilege possible, but to no avail.

It is interesting to see that the choicest vine is also referred to as the pleasant plant in verse 7. Added to this is the fact that this pleasant plant represents the men of Judah. Isaiah prophesied about the time that the ten tribes were taken into captivity, and his prophecies concerned kings of Judah (Isa. 1:1). In spite of the privileges shown them, because of God's covenant with David, they were no better than the other tribes.

When the Lord Jesus came to earth as we well know, He was of the royal line. Matthew's gospel begins with the words: 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David'. We remember too that He is called, 'The Lion of the tribe of Judah' (Rev. 5:5). This is all very interesting and will call for our attention when we come to look at John 15. Is the pleasant plant of Isaiah 5 the True Vine of that chapter?

The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen

The parable told by the Lord Jesus and recorded by each of the three synoptic evangelists, alludes to the passage in Isaiah 5. It refers to the ill-treatment meted out to the servants sent by the householder to receive the fruits from the vineyard. They refer to the Old Testament prophets. As well as the lack of fruitfulness from the vine, there was also the cruelty shown to the prophets sent by God. Jeremiah is one example.

However, in the parable a further stage is described. The householder had 'one son'. This was the final attempt to receive fruit from the vineyard. The response is very clearly given, 'But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him' (Matt. 21:38,39). What is put in parabolic language was enacted actually at the cross. Every detail of the parable is full of meaning.

The question is asked as to what the lord of the vineyard will do unto those husbandmen? The answer is worth quoting in full, 'He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons' (v. 41). The period of probation was ended and the nation was guilty. There was no fruit for God. Only judgment from God could come upon them.

It is difficult to say who it is that shall render fruits for God. It may be a reference to the present day, or it may look on to the time when Israel will be restored. However, for the moment Israel was set aside.

The Lord Jesus quoted from the Old Testament Scriptures with which His hearers would be familiar. 'Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?' (v. 42). They found no place for Him in their schemes; He did not fit in! But God was to reverse their attitude and make him the head of the corner. They fell on the stone and were broken. Paul puts it in another way, 'For they stumbled at that stumbling stone' (Rom. 9:32).

The parable goes on to say, 'but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder'. It is this same parable that Peter uses to charge the nation with their guilt (Acts 4:11). However, the door was opened to those who would repent and believe. Salvation was available to them.

The True Vine

It is in the gospel of John that we meet with this name given to the Lord Jesus. To quote His words He says, 'I am the true vine'. First of all let us isolate the words, 'I am'. The reason for doing this is to underline the truth of His person. The expression 'I am' is a divine name. It occurs on many occasions in John's gospel. 'I am the light of the world', 'I am the bread of life', and there are others.

In every case His divine person is underlined by the words 'I am'. This name is given to God in the Old Testament scriptures. One example is in the book of Exodus: 'And God said unto Moses, 'I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you' (Ex. 3:14). Therefore when it is used by the Lord Jesus Christ He is asserting His deity. This is not unexpected in the gospel of John, where His person as the Son of God is the theme.

We come now to a consideration of the Lord Jesus as the true vine. In the previous part of this article we looked at Israel as the vine, but the nation failed to bring forth fruit. First, there was fruit in His life. There was never a word out of place and every act was perfect so the Father was glorified. The words of the first Psalm with their application to the Lord Jesus, are helpful here: 'And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season' (v. 3). His season may be likened to the many and varied circumstances in which he was found. In every one God was honoured.

The expression 'true' is used on a number of occasions in John's gospel with regard to the Lord. It does not mean true in contrast to false. It would not be right to say that Israel as the vine was false, because God had planted her. One Old Testament scripture quotes God as addressing Israel and saying, 'Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into a degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?' (Jer. 2:21).

As we have said, they failed, but there could be no fault in the planting. The word 'true' then as applied to the Lord Jesus means that he was the reality. In many ways it may be substance in contrast to shadow. The Lord Jesus as the true vine filled Israel's place, and there was fruit for God.

Fruit Bearing

We come now to the subject of fruit-bearing. The Lord Jesus teaches the disciples how they will be able to bear fruit during His absence. At the end of chapter 14 it would seem that the Lord left the upper room to make his way to the garden of Gethsemane. The communications of chapter 14 were given inside, but the teaching about fruit-bearing was given outside.

This is of importance. Fruit-bearing, which is likeness to Christ, must be in evidence in the world out of which He was cast. Verse 2 of chapter 15 says, 'Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit'.

We will look at what the Lord says about the branch that does bear fruit. The purging may be washing or it may be pruning, but whatever it is, it is the husbandman who does it. We are told very clearly 'my Father is the husbandman'. This pruning may refer to discipline, but done in love in order that there is further fruitfulness. Usually in the New Testament it is the Father who chastens. If it is washing, it is by the word in its cleansing power. They were already clean through the word, this was done once for all and had no need to be repeated (v. 3), but there was also the need for an ongoing washing.

In what way would the disciples be able to bear fruit while He was absent from them? Let us look at verse 4 of our chapter. 'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me'. The word 'abide' is used by John very frequently. It is rendered in different ways. Sometimes it is

'remain' and at other times it is 'continue', but all having the same basic meaning.

The Lord Jesus begins by alluding to the actual vine. There can be no fruit produced unless the branch abides in the vine. If the branch is severed from the tree, there is no life or vitality and therefore no fruit. He then turns from the illustration from nature to the real spiritual meaning for the disciples. Fruitfulness is promoted by abiding in Christ. What does it really mean to do this? It may be more easily understood if we say, 'Keep close to the Lord! Draw all resource from Him'. In the book of Acts one of the Lord's servants, Barnabas by name, exhorted the saints 'that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord' (Acts 11:23). The word 'cleave' is also the same word as 'abide' in the original.

Verse 5 carries on the same theme. 'I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing'. The matter of abiding is two way, 'abideth in me and I in him'. Two very important truths come out here. Firstly, it speaks of communion and intimacy. Secondly, 'I in him' suggests that Christ is expressed practically in life. Verse 6 refers to a branch with no vital connection with the vine; we would say in our day, a professor.

Following on to verse 7, the subject of the vine, which in a particular way, related to Israel, is discontinued. The theme is very simply that of 'abiding in Christ', into which we may fit as Christians. Also another theme is introduced here: 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you'. 'My words' is a very important addition. The expression used does not mean the whole Word, but rather the Lord's words which are applicable to a particular situation. The subject of our praying comes in here. That which the Lord says is very striking, 'ye shall ask what ye will'. Of course if His words are abiding in us our asking will be according to His will. It is because of this that we have the assurance that 'it shall be done unto you'.

Verse 8 completes this section of John 15. Bearing fruit glorifies the Father. When the Lord Jesus was here, He glorified the Father in every way. All the Father was in nature and character was seen in Him. The concept is very wonderful: if we are living Christ-like lives then the Father is glorified. This marks us out as Christ's disciples. Our words are so poor, the Scripture is so much better, 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples' (v. 8).

The truth of fruit-bearing is by no means restricted to John 15. At the beginning of this article we referred to Colossians 1:10 ('being fruitful in every good work'). One of the best known passages from the pen of the apostle Paul is Galatians 5: 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law' (Gal. 5:22,23). These are all features that are seen in Christ. Let us endeavour to excel in bearing fruit. We will not do it in our own strength. We must remember the Lord's words already quoted, '... without me ye can do nothing'. The passage in Galatians gives us the secret for bearing fruit. 'This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh' (Gal. 5:16). Instead, the fruit of the Spirit will be seen.

Another scripture dealing with producing fruit is Hebrews 12:11. This time it is the Father's chastening. 'Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby'. Let us be concerned about bearing fruit. We have already pointed out that fruit is for God's pleasure, but all around us will benefit, whether saint or sinner.

As we bring to a close this paper on the Vine may we be concerned about bearing fruit in our lives. Thinking of the passage of scripture at the head of this article, '... the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?' Let us not seek a

place here, but rather be occupied with that which brings joy to God's heart as well as to others.

Bearing fruit is walking as Christ walked. The real secret is to abide in Christ. However, we need to beware of 'the little foxes, that spoil the vines' (Cant. 2:15). Things that may even be legitimate can be a hindrance to our abiding in Christ. The flesh is always active bringing the need of constant self-discipline. Soon the Lord will come and the opportunities will be past. We rejoice that in His presence we will be like Him for we will see Him as He is.