

The Vineyard, Vine, and Olive Tree



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If you were to travel through the central hill country of Israel today in the right season, you would find an abundance of fruitful vines. The fruit of the vine, of course, is the grape, whose juice, when fermented, produces wine. The vine and the vineyard are characteristic of Israel's agricultural fertility and serve as potent images for the land itself.

**I will sing for the one I love
a song about His vineyard:
My loved one had a vineyard
on a fertile hillside
He dug it up and cleared it of stones
And planted it with the choicest vines.
He built a watchtower in it
and cut out a winepress as well.
Then He looked for a crop of good grapes
(Isaiah 5:1-2, NIV)**

The Good-For-Nothing Vineyard

This vineyard lesson reveals that God expected His chosen nation to bear fruit—in other words, to carry out His work and to uphold justice. Unfortunately it did bear fruit, but the fruit was sour and wild. (See Isaiah 5:2: “and it brought forth wild grapes.”)

“And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry” (Isaiah 5:3-7).

This passage uses a play on words: The Hebrew words for *judgment* and *oppression* sound very much alike, as do those for *righteousness* and cry. Jesus said, “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). This lesson of the vineyard can be taken personally, urging us to examine our own “fruit.”

These verses of Isaiah refer to Israel, the barren “vineyard.” On the other hand, Jerusalem and the Temple are referred to in the Bible as the “vine.”

In the eighth century B.C. the Lord lamented through Isaiah over the barren condition of the vineyard (Israel) and the vine (Jerusalem).

When God led His people into the Promised Land (the vineyard) under Joshua's leadership, He removed the godless nations whose hearts were as stone towards Him. Then He planted the Promised Land with the "choicest vine." The tower He built in the midst of it represents the first Temple, which was built by King Solomon.

God did amazing things for Israel. He led His people out of Egypt through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. He removed the stones (the heathen) and planted Israel as a choice vine. Israel is God's vineyard, not only because God loves it, but also because He painstakingly prepared the land and planted it. He also carefully protected it. In this way the parable describes God's election of Israel as a nation (Deuteronomy 7:7-11) and His providential care of it. As it is with any vineyard, the Vinedresser does all his work with the expectation of a fruitful and bountiful harvest.

In Psalm 80, we see another example of this same theme. The Psalmist describes the Exodus in the language of a vineyard: "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" (Psalm 80:8-9).

What do we suppose God expects from us, after everything He has done for us? Could God be waiting to see our fruit? Three times the Psalmist calls on God to "turn us again" (Psalm 80:3,7,19). Repentance involves humbling ourselves and turning to God to receive His forgiveness and restoration. When we stand before Jesus Christ, He will be looking for fruit—"the fruit of the Spirit." "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22).

The spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit in us produces these character traits, which are found in

the nature of Christ. We of ourselves can't obtain them. They are the by-products of the motivating Spirit of Christ. If we want the fruit to grow in us we must join our lives to His. "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. 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" (John 15:4-5).

And so this prophesy of Isaiah 5:3-6 came to pass. God withdrew His hand of protection, blessing, and mercy from Israel, so that the hostile nations (the Assyrians and Babylonians) could fall upon Israel like wild beasts. Because they refused to surrender themselves to the Lord God and follow Him wholeheartedly, they became caught up in the world, their thoughts being on earthly things and worldly ways.

Jerusalem: The Vine Rejected

In the sixth century B.C., the prophet Ezekiel appeared on the scene for the first time. By this time the first of the Babylonian attacks had occurred and some of the Israelites had been removed from the land.

The prophet Ezekiel lived some 150-200 years later than Isaiah. Even though Isaiah lived in Israel, and Ezekiel was a captive of Babylon, Ezekiel's prophecies followed the prophecies of Isaiah without interruption or contradiction.

However, Ezekiel not only prophesied of the "vineyard" (Israel), but also of the "vine" (Jerusalem). Ezekiel writes, "Then this message came to me from the LORD: 'Son of man, how does a grapevine compare to a tree? Is a vine's wood as useful as the wood of a tree?

Can its wood be used for making things, like pegs to hang up pots and pans? No, it can only be used for fuel, and even as fuel, it burns too quickly. Vine branches are useless both before and after being put into the fire! And this is what the Sovereign LORD says: The people of Jerusalem are like grapevines growing among the trees of the forest. Since they are useless, I have set them aside to be burned! And I will see to it that if they escape from one fire, they will fall into another. When this happens, you will know that I am the LORD. And I will make the land desolate because my people have been unfaithful to me, says the sovereign LORD” (Ezekiel 15:1-8, New Living Translation).

In chapters 15 through 17, Ezekiel provides further evidence that God was indeed going to destroy Jerusalem. In the story of the vine, we find it was useless at first and even of less value after being burned. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were useless to God because of their idol worship, they therefore would be destroyed and their cities burned. We dare not allow ourselves to become dormant and unfruitful to God. We need to be about our Father’s business.

The illustration here could not be plainer. God simply had no further use for Jerusalem. As a vine, it failed to bring forth fruit, and even the wood of the vine was good for nothing, except to be burned (Ezekiel 15:5). Burning was the fate that fell upon that generation, allowed by the Vinedresser.

The great blessing—to be used of God as a witness to the nations—was lost by Jerusalem, so there was no longer any need for the city or the Temple. “Bring the people who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. ‘Gather the nations together! Which of their idols has ever foretold such things? Can any of them predict something, even a single day, in advance? Where are the witnesses of such predictions? Who can verify that they spoke the truth? But you are my witnesses, O Israel!’ says the LORD. And you are my servant. You have been chosen to know me, believe in me, and understand that I alone am God. There is no other God; there never has been and never will be. I am the LORD, and there is no other Savior” (Isaiah 43:8-11, NLT).

But Israel did exactly the opposite. She bowed down before the idols of the nations and worshipped them instead of testifying by word and deed that they were children and witnesses of the true God.

Under Jeroboam 11, Israel prospered and gained military and economic strength. But the more the nation prospered, the more love the people lavished on idols. “How prosperous Israel is—a luxuriant vine loaded with fruit! But the more wealth the people got, the more they poured on the altars of their foreign gods. The richer the harvests they brought in, the more beautiful the statues and idols they built” (Hosea 10:1, NLT).

Compromising with sin is always a bad move and in the end it will bring barrenness. At first, Israel produced fruit, but then she compromised with Assyria and Babylon. The result produced shriveled up “grapes” in the vineyard that fell off the vine, and could no longer be harvested to make good wine. Israel was unfaithful to her God; therefore, the Temple lost its right to exist. Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple, once God gave them over to the nations, all fell prey to the fire.

The Babylonians literally burned down the “vineyard” and then the “vine” (Jerusalem and the Temple) in the very manner as foretold by the prophets.

The bad fruit is not the responsibility of the vinedresser, who took careful pains to plant and take care of the vine (Ezekiel 17:5-6). It is the vine itself that is at fault. It produced bad grapes in spite of all the advantages it had.

Because the fruit the vineyard produced was not good, God is going to come in *judgment* and destroy the vineyard. In one of the more interesting biblical uses of the vineyard

image, Deuteronomy emphasizes not only judgment but also the organic connection between the sins of God's people and those of the notorious city of Sodom: "Their vine grows from the vine of Sodom, from the vineyards of Gomorrah. Their grapes are poison, and their clusters are bitter. Their wine is the venom of snakes, the deadly poison of vipers" (Deuteronomy 32:32).

The Babylonians came for the first time and occupied Israel in 605 B.C. At that time Daniel the prophet was carried off to Babylon.

King Nebuchadnezzar's army came for the second time in 597 B.C. At that time Ezekiel was taken to the land of the Chaldeans. And so the word was fulfilled: "The fire burns both ends." But Jerusalem at that time had been spared. The fire came very near to the city, however, "and chars the middle." "Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire devoureth both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned" (Ezekiel 15:4). Finally the time of their ultimate destruction by fire came in 586 B.C. In the truest sense of the word the land was made desolate. "Because they have committed a trespass, saith the LORD God" (verse 8).

Restoration Brings Fertility to the Vine

At times it may seem difficult to understand, but God's mercy is for everyone. God's handling of the Jews and the Gentiles is intended to expose all of us to His mercy. The sum of Paul's argument is that in the end there will be space for both Jews and Gentiles in the plan of God. How God will perform this is aptly called a mystery!

The apostle Paul in the book of Romans reveals to us the God of Israel, whose gifts and calling are irrevocable. "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Romans 11:29). This verse could also be translated "the privileges and invitation of God [given to Israel] can never be withdrawn. This means that His people are beloved for the Father's sake, even though they failed and were unfaithful and even proved themselves enemies of the Gospel. Because of this the Lord made the following promise. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him... They that dwell under His shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard Him, and observed Him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found" (Hosea 14:4,7-8).

Just imagine, the "vineyard" and the "vine" were both burned. Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple were destroyed. Even the "wall" and "hedge" were torn down.

How come the burned vine didn't perish? Remember what Hosea said in verse 8 previously: "From me is thy fruit found." If God's anger and judgment are represented by the destroyed vineyard, it should not be surprising that God's blessing and restoration are expressed through the image of the fertile vineyard. The prophets were inspired by God to look beyond the judgment to the restoration and envisioned healthy and productive vineyards. "Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat them as common things" (Jeremiah 31:5).

In the future, Israel will turn. Their turning will come from the Messiah. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman" (John 15:1). Therefore, the statement we read in Hosea previously clearly points to the Messiah. Through Him Israel will bear fruit and will flourish as a vine covering the entire world.

Psalm 80 recalls the history of Israel's exodus from Egypt and the description of taking possession of Canaan. Verse 11 tells us, "She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and

her branches unto the river.” This is a clear indication of the territory under Israel’s influence, extended from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea by David and Solomon. But, then came destruction. The “hedges” were pulled down, the “boar out of the wood” and the “wild beast of the field” devastated the vine (verses 12-13). Assyria and Babylon are here referred to, and perhaps even others of the unclean nations.

In verses 14 and 15, the Psalmist seems to be beseeching God to turn, even as He had been imploring His people to turn. The purpose of His turning is that He may “look and see” the condition of the desolated vineyard and thence be moved to interfere for its restoration. “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” (verses 14-15). Verse 15 may even allude to Jacob’s blessing (Genesis 49:22), for Joseph is called a “fruitful bough,” literally meaning “son.”

However, if you take a cutting from an old vine and plant it in the ground, the old vine lives on in the cutting even if it is burned. This “cutting” is the Son of God. He was born into this world as a Jew. He was planted in this world. Thus the burned “vine” of Israel lives on in Jesus Christ. Remember what Jesus said at His first appearing. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman” (John 15:1). Therefore, the true “vine,” Jesus, replaces the barren “vine,” Israel. “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...If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned” (John 15:2,6).

Judas the betrayer separated himself from Jesus and perished. To the other disciples Jesus said, “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3).

Because the leaders of the Jewish people did not want Jesus: “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). The result of this attitude brought troops from the Roman emperor to Israel. Jerusalem was besieged, captured, and burned. And the Psalmist’s words come back to us like an echo. “It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance” (Psalm 80:16).

Finding Salvation Assurance

Many people go through life wondering if they will be saved. Even though they have been properly baptized and received the laying on of hands, they still have doubts. Well, just what does God require of people before giving them the gift of eternal life and *assurance* of entry into the Kingdom? This is a very serious question, and it is vital for all believers to have a biblical answer they can trust in.

Israel, as God’s vine in the Old Testament, was a great disappointment because it yielded only rotten fruit; that is, they refused to give God love and obedience. The scriptures we have already covered provide a very graphic picture of Israel’s failure and many poignant passages for Jesus to draw upon.

Jesus with all believers “abiding” in Him is the TRUE VINE—the true fulfillment of God’s plan for His people. This new society of God’s people—Christians—originates from Jesus Christ and is united to Him as branches are to a vine. God the Father is the gardener, the cultivator of the vine and the branches. Here is where it gets tricky, because believers, both true and false, are pictured here as the branches.

The fruitful branches are true believers who, by their living union with Christ, produce much fruit. However, a true believer can break the union. The Father cuts off every

branch that doesn't produce fruit. Those who become unproductive and turn back from following Christ are cut off from the vine. Just what kind of fruit does God expect of us? Fruit is not limited to bringing others to Christ.

Notice these verses in John chapter 15: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (verse 7). Answered prayer is a very important fruit to have produced in your life. Jesus speaks of "joy" as being fruit that He desires to remain in you fully. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (verse 11).

He also gives us a commandment that involves loving one another. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you" (verse 12). We are to love each other as Jesus loved us, and He loved us enough to lay down His life. Most likely for us there will not be any need to die in place of someone, but there are other ways to practice sacrificial love, such as listening, helping, encouraging, and giving.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23). The apostle Paul's introduction of the word *fruit* is filled with meaning. The meaning he conveyed is of a full harvest of virtues. Fruit is a by-product; it takes time to grow and requires care and cultivation. It is the *Spirit* that produces the fruit. We must get in tune with the Spirit through drawing close to God. This will allow us to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. This exhibiting of the fruit of the Spirit is not accomplished by our works, but simply because the Holy Spirit abides in us—if we are true Christians.

The fruit of the Spirit separates the follower of Jesus Christ from a godless, evil world, revealing a power within that helps the follower become more Christ-like in daily living.

In previous verses, Paul presented the works of the flesh that stand in stark contrast to the fruit of the Spirit. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). This is a very strong warning from Paul. He is telling us clearly, it is not a matter of whether you were saved or not. Rather, he said, all who participate in the "works of the flesh" shall not inherit the Kingdom.

Once we are in a saved condition, our sins being blotted out of the record, and we receive the Holy Spirit, we can have complete confidence that, as a branch, we are fully attached to the Vine, Jesus Christ. No matter what the weather conditions that we may encounter in life, as long as we do not abandon the Vine and shrivel up, we can be sure we are sealed for the day of redemption. "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

Our assurance of salvation exists only in Jesus Christ. It was Jesus who prayed for us, and that is wonderful news. Jesus prayed this prayer, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:21-23).

Jesus makes three requests of the Father. In the first request, Jesus asked for unity—that they would be one. This petition includes all the believers throughout time. This unity becomes most visible through love, obedience, and commitment to the Father's will.

In the second request, Jesus prayed for a unity among the believers that is based on the unity of Jesus and the Father. All followers of Christ can be unified if they live in union with God. For example, each branch living in union with the Vine is united with all other branches (see John 15:1-17); or each part of the body is united with the other parts so that when one hurts, they all hurt, and when one rejoices, they all rejoice (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). This union with the Father and Son would result in people all over the world believing that Jesus had been sent by God as the world's Savior—and not only believing, but receiving this Savior as their own. Jesus' third request tells us that all people have the opportunity to be attached to the true Vine in their lifetime.

Don't put off getting attached to the true Vine, Jesus Christ. The opportunity for assured salvation grows shorter every day for this generation.

The Special Olive Tree

We find in the Bible numerous types of trees used as illustrations of Israel. "The brier, the fig tree, the pomegranate tree, the vine, the vineyard, and the olive tree. Each tree explains a different facet of Israel. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, uses a picture of the olive tree to show that Israel will not remain rejected, but will have a glorious future.

In the past the Jewish people had heard words of rejection. While in the depths of their sinfulness when King Manasseh ruled the northern kingdom of Israel, God said He would forsake His people because of their sin. "And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies; because they have done that which was evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day" (2 Kings 21:14-15).

Even Jeremiah had warned the people that God had abandoned them. "Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places; for the LORD hath rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath" (Jeremiah 7:29).

With this question Paul expresses a deep concern. Has God actually given up on Israel and finally grown tired of their constant disobedience and rejected them forever? Paul's answer is absolutely not! Paul reasoned that he had received salvation, and he was a Jew, a descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin, (Romans 11:1). If God were going to reject anyone surely it would have been Paul, because he persecuted Christians before he ever became a believer.

Paul reasoned, and rightly so, that God did not reject His people in the days of Moses, or in the days of the prophets. And He is not rejecting them now. "God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew" (Romans 11:2). Even though Israel has continued to be unfaithful, God always keeps His promises. It was God who chose Israel to be a people through whom all other nations of the world would come to know Him. It was to Abraham, Israel's ancestor that God made the promise to, and Israel didn't have to do anything to be chosen. Speaking to Abraham, God said, "And I will make of thee a *great nation*, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2).

In the book of Romans, Paul continues to point out Israel's stumbling, but at the same time he makes it clear that the nation is not beyond recovery. Their blindness is not permanent and their fall is not fatal. Israel's stumbling means that salvation has come to the Gentiles, and Israel's rejection of Christ was a part of God's plan all along as essential as God's sovereign choice of Jacob over Esau. The salvation of the Gentiles has a purpose, and that purpose is to *make the Jews jealous*.

Paul's desire is for the Jews to recognize that God greatly blessed the Gentiles when they believed in the Jews' own Messiah. The Jews may then realize that the same blessings offered to the Gentiles are available to them as a part of God's covenant, but they can only be obtained by faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul believes that Israel's refusal to accept Christ is only temporary. He explains this using an illustration. The roots, obviously, are the first part of a tree, and form the "character" of the branches. The faith of Abraham was like the root of a productive tree, and the Jewish people are the tree's natural branches. As a result of God's choice and Abraham's faithful response, the nation that descended from him was holy. If the faithful root is holy, then any branch nourished by that root will be holy also.

Only some of the branches were broken off of the tree, because of sin and unbelief. These broken off branches are the unbelieving Jews. In their place the Gentiles, whom Paul likens to branches from a wild olive tree, are grafted in. Paul warns the Gentiles, "the wild olive shoots" who have been grafted in to the cultivated olive tree (Israel), not to be arrogant or brag, for it is possible to remove them, and it is possible for the natural branches to be grafted back in. Speaking of Israel, Paul said, "And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again" (Romans 11:23).

We become part of God's "tree" by faith. If not by faith, we forfeit any potential relationship with God by unbelief. Gentiles are graciously grafted into God's family. A wayward Jew who discovers the faith of Abraham is coming home. "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?" (Romans 11:24).

God does not use the olive tree without reason. The olive tree as a picture of Israel illustrates a most illustrious future. The olive tree is one of the most valuable trees in ancient Palestine. It was often the only tree of any size in the locality. It was named "king" of the trees (Judges 9:8), an indication of its economic importance in antiquity.

The olive tree symbolizes beauty, strength, and peace. The Psalm refers to its fruitfulness. "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table" (Psalm 128:3). Hosea speaks of the beauty of Israel, "His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon" (Hosea 14:6).

The olive tree is quite special in many ways. It has many branches and roots and is gnarled. It grows to be very old and can be continually re-grown through pruning. It has no year rings, and it remains green all year round.

God chose the nation of Israel, and He has never rejected it. "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: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Romans 11:26-27).

Many believe that the phrase "all Israel shall be saved" means that the majority of Jews in the final generation before Christ's return will turn to Christ for salvation. Others believe Paul is using the term *Israel* to refer to the "spiritual" nation of Israel, which is comprised of Jews and Gentiles who have received salvation through faith in Christ. Therefore, "all Israel," or all believers, will receive God's promised gift of salvation. Still others believe that the phrase means that Israel as a whole will have a role in Christ's Kingdom, that the Jews' identity as a people won't be discarded, for God chose the nation of Israel, and He has

never rejected it. This is the best understanding, for God also chose the church, through Jesus Christ, and He will never reject it either. This does not mean either group has carte-blanc salvation. Every individual must remain faithful and continually grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, their sinful nature being overcome by the Holy Spirit that resides in them.

Paul's intention is to demonstrate that God had not rejected Israel. Really, Paul believed the nation of Israel would be restored to God. Both Jews and Gentiles will make up the flourishing tree that represents the Kingdom, as well as the brush pile of broken branches prepared for burning that represents those who unfortunately have rejected God's gracious offer of forgiveness.

Paul quotes from Isaiah 59:20-21: "And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord." Jesus Christ is the deliverer that will come from Jerusalem. Also their sins shall be taken away (Jeremiah 31:33-34). Indeed, everyone at that time will know the Lord, and their sins shall be forgotten.

God is quite willing to have mercy on all who come to Him. Isaiah 60 reveals the beautiful picture of Jews and Gentiles experiencing the rich blessings of God.

The olive tree is also connected to the *return* of Jesus Christ, for when the Lord returns to Israel He will be returning to the Mount of Olives, or Mount of the Olive Trees. "And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south" (Zechariah 14:4).

God's glory departed from the Temple and was never completely present again until Christ Himself visited it in New Testament times. Ezekiel, in vision, watched as the glory of the Lord left the city: "Then the glory of the LORD went up from the city and stopped above the mountain to the east" (Ezekiel 11:23). Again in the spirit, Ezekiel sees the return of God's glory: "And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and His voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with His glory. And it was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, even according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east" (Ezekiel 43:2-4).

It must have been quite devastating for Ezekiel when God's glory departed from the Temple; and now, to see it return he was overwhelmed with awe and joy beyond his ability to express. These verses imply that God will return the same way He left.

The signal for the destruction of the city and the Temple was given by God's departure. Now, for God to return, His conditions must be met: Idolatry had to be removed. Ezekiel could have been commanding the people to build the Temple according to the directions he had received from the angelic architect, but the people never repented and God's conditions were never met, so the fulfillment didn't occur.

In the book of Acts will be found the last statement of Christ on earth: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 1:8). After giving these important instructions, the disciples observed Jesus ascending up into the sky and disappearing into a cloud. This cloud was symbolic of the

glory of God. A cloud also enveloped Jesus and three of His disciples at the Transfiguration (Luke 9:34-35).

It was important for the disciples to see Jesus make this transition. The Ascension confirmed for them that Jesus truly was God. While they watched Him disappear out of sight, two angelic beings appeared. They told the disciples that someday, just as you saw Him go, He will return. Most assuredly, it will be on the Mount of Olives.

The Mount of Olives is “the mountain which is on the east side of the city” of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 11:23). Only the half-mile-wide Kedron Valley separates the Holy City from the Sacred Mountain. In reality there are three distinctly-marked, rounded summits: Mount Scopus on the north, the Mount of Offence on the south, and Mount of Olives in the center. It stands 2,680 feet above sea level, which means that it is about 200 feet higher than the Temple area in Jerusalem.

On the central part of the summit are the remains of the so-called “Church of the Ascension,” the original of which was erected during the fourth century with funds furnished by Emperor Constantine. In recent years, an ancient cemetery has been discovered near the traditional place where Jesus wept over Jerusalem. P. B. Bagatti has investigated the tombs, and according to his reckoning the burial place was in use during the first century A.D., and also in the third and fourth centuries. Some thirty-six ossuaries (burial chests) were found which belonged to the first century. Inscribed on these are such names as Jarius, Simon Bar-Jonah, Mary, Martha, and Siloam. One ossuary bears the name of “Juda the proselyte of Tyre.”

Bearing Good Fruit

“Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with scoffers. But they delight in doing everything the LORD wants; day and night they think about His law. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season without fail. Their leaves never wither and in all they do, they prosper” (Psalms 1:1-3, NLT).

There is much simple wisdom in these verses. When we apply God’s wisdom, the fruit (results or by-products) we bear will be good and receive God’s approval. Just as a tree soaks up water and bears luscious fruit, we also are to soak up God’s Word, producing actions and attitudes that honor God. To achieve anything worthwhile, we must have God’s Word in our hearts.

The Church of God International
P.O. Box 2525
Tyler, TX 75710
903-939-2929

About the Church of God International

This literature is published by the Church of God International, based in Tyler, Texas. Incorporated in 1978, the CGI has ministers and congregations scattered throughout the United States and Canada. We also have churches in Jamaica, the Philippines, and Australia.

The CGI's mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world (Matthew 28:19). We are blessed with four basic tools to accomplish this:

- 1. Personal and local church evangelism.*
- 2. Television and radio broadcasting.*
- 3. Booklets, brochures, and study tapes.*
- 4. The Internet.*

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United States: Church of God International 3900 Timms St. Tyler, TX 75701 (903) 939-2929	Jamaica: Church of God International P.O. Box 776 Kingston 19 Jamaica
Canada: Church of God International Canadian Office PO Box 33034 900 Oxford St E London, ON N5Y 5A1	Philippines: Church of God International Makati Central P.O. Box 2450 1264 Makati Metro Manila, Philippines
Australia: Church of God International P.O. Box 171 Boonah, Qlnd 4310	Web site: www.cgi.org E-mail: info@cgi.org

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