

The Vine and the Fig Tree

Our Old Testament reading in Psalm 80 depicts Israel as a Vine, and our New Testament reading in Mark 11 speaks of Messiah cursing a fig tree, again a *type* of Israel. For the basis of our exhortation today, we shall consider both, as reflecting two aspects of God's People, Spiritual and National.

THE VINE

In Psalm 80, It is written:

“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” (verses 8-11).

This describes how God “called his son out of Egypt”. He delivered His people from bondage, cast out the Heathen from the Land of Promise and caused them to prosper in the Land. This is also described in Isaiah 5:

“Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes ... “.

So we see that after delivering His people from Egypt, Yahweh cleared the land through the work of the Angel which went before them (Ex 23:3) and planted them in it for a particular purpose - to bring forth grapes, fruit to the Glory of Yahweh. But the Israelitish vine did not bring forth good fruits, but “rotten”, or “corrupt” grapes (Is 5:2, “Wild” is from Hebrew “To stink”), not to Gods' glory, but “to himself” (Hos 10:9). Through Jeremiah, the Lord asks:

“Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?” (Jer. 2:21).

And so those unfruitful branches were “broken off”, and “set on fire” (Is 27:11). Indeed, the whole vine was then fruitless, and so it was prophesied by Ezekiel:

“therefore, thus saith the Lord Yahweh, As the vine tree among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will set my face against them; they shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them; and ye shall know that I am Yahweh, when I set my face against them” (Eze. 15:6).

In John 15, the Lord Jesus expounds Psalm 80, and applies the figure of the Vine to Himself:

“I am *the true vine*, and my Father is the husbandman. 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 ... now ye 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. 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”.

Here, the word “true” is used in the sense of Substance as distinct from Type, rather than something which is not False. In Psalm 80, we have the Type of a vine, in John 15, the “True vine”, the reality, or substance. Israel was an unfruitful vine, but the Lord Jesus was perfect, and bare perfect fruit to the Glory of the Father.

The fruit was the Grape, from which Wine is made, which “cheereth God and man” (Judges 9:13). Here, we have a type of the Sacrifice of our Lord, for in order for wine to be made, the grape must be bruised, that the blood runs out. So, the Lord Jesus was bruised in the heel (Gen 3:15), that man might have gladness, and love which is better than wine (Song 1:2). But if we are branches “in” the True Vine, we also must bear fruit, lest we be removed. What is this fruit? A tree is identified by its fruits.

“Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Mat 7:16-19).

The fruit that we must bear therefore, consists of those characteristics which define what type of tree we are of.

“Good fruit” is the fruit of the Spirit, which “Is love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance” and is “in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (Gal 5:22, Eph 5:9). Notice, that there are many facets, but one fruit. Just as there are many grapes upon the vine, yet only one fruit. Here, the fruit which we must bear are the characteristics needed to show what tree we are of, that we are part of the “true vine”, being branches which derive their nourishment from Christ. The symbol of a vine then, is used to show the spiritual aspect of Israel, How she should have been, bringing joy to her Lord. Yet it is also a *type* of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the branches which are in him, bearing the fruit of the spirit, bringing forth Joy by the bruising of the Perfect one, who rose up as “The firstfruits” from the dead (1Cor 15:23).

Returning to Psalm 80, we have reference to a specific branch of the tree: “the branch that thou madest strong for thyself” (vs. 15). And this is further defined: “Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself” (vs. 17). This is evidently referring to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Son of Man, “made strong” by Yahweh, for his Father’s Purpose. He is “the Branch” of Zechariah 6:12, who shall build again the Temple of Yahweh. His apostle, Paul, wrote: “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). The Lord was “crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God” (2 Cor. 13:4). His being “made strong” was his resurrection to glorious immortality, through which we can have hope: “when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10). The followers of Christ can also look forward to being “made strong”, as it is written, “they that wait upon Yahweh shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa. 40:31).

THE FIG TREE

In his parable of Luke 13:6-9, The Lord Jesus spake:

“A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon and found none”.

So, the Fig tree again was something which was to bear fruit, and was also planted in the vineyard. We have seen from Isaiah 5 that the vineyard is the land following the removal of the Gentile stones. Therefore, the fig tree again represents the people which were planted in the land. It is this national aspect which is again emphasised by Jeremiah, in his vision of 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” (24:2).

The interpretation is given:

“like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive out of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good.” “And as the evil figs which cannot be eaten, they are so evil, surely thus saith Yahweh, so will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt, and I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt” (v 5,8).

Thus, the figs represent the people, good figs, those who submitted to the word of God and went into captivity, and bad figs, those like Zedekiah, who rebelled, and who were to be delivered into all kingdoms of the earth for their hurt. Whilst the vine speaks of what the Spiritual condition of Israel should have been like, the figs represent the individuals who made up the nation, (indicated perhaps, by the multitude of seeds contained in the fruit). The tree itself, we suggest, represents the Nation as a whole.

The first reference to the fig tree in Scripture, is the clumsy attempt by Adam and Eve to cover their nakedness, following their sin:

“... the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons” (Gen. 3:7).

However, this covering was most unsatisfactory, hence the sinful pair hid themselves in the shade of the trees in the garden (vs. 8). They were brought out of this situation by the Word of the Lord, and given a covering of skin by the Almighty Himself: “Unto Adam also and to his wife did Yahweh God make coats of skin, and clothed them” (vs. 21). Just as they would have had to remove their fig-leaf contrivance, and put on the skin – from a sacrifice of God’s Providing - we must do likewise: “lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:10).

In our New Testament reading, the Lord curses a fig tree:

“and seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it”

Then, the next day, we read:

“and in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursest is withered away ...” (Mrk. 11:13-14, 20-21).

It has been thought that the Lord was being unreasonable in requiring fruit when it was not yet the time for fruit to be borne. However, the difficulty is removed when we appreciate that there were spiritual lessons being taught in this event. Paul admonished Timothy:

“Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2).

Here is the point: we must not only be fruitful when it is to be expected, but “out of season” also, when the conditions seem to be not conducive to the production of fruit.

There are also other applications of this symbol in Scripture. Like grapes, figs were grown to be eaten, and so were a source of strength and nourishment, as it is written:

“Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof (Prov 27:18).

Also, figs are associated with healing, as in the case of Hezekiah:

“And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered” (2Kings 20:7).

Upon the Israelitish fig tree, there should have been good figs, people who fed many with their lips (Prov. 10:21), healing the spiritual sore of the people, which reached from “the sole of the foot even unto the head” (Isa. 1:6). But as we have seen, the people were spiritually famished, and there was no healing (2 Chron. 36:16). This was also the state of affairs when the Lord Jesus Christ came to the Israelitish Fig Tree, for it bare no fruit and so it was to be cut down by the Roman army.

The Vine and Fig tree are also used to describe the blessings that will be present in Messiah’s kingdom to come:

“... they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; And none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of Yahweh of hosts hath spoken it” (Mic. 4:4).

This is the Hope of Israel: Divine blessings in a restored paradise. We must take heed to the lessons of the Vine and Fig tree. The times are coming when every man’s work shall be made manifest. We must be found to be good figs, bearing the fruits of the Spirit, being a source of spiritual strength and nourishment to each other, that we might be made part of the “wood of life” which will “bare twelve manner of fruits,” and yield “her fruit every month:”, the leaves of which will be “for the healing of the nations (Rev 22:2).

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