

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#04-1080

Trees in Scripture

August 2, 2010

As stated in the previous issue (#04-1079), the Word of God uses many agricultural and horticultural metaphors. In particular, the tree is often used as a metaphor for people or nations or kingdoms or national powers.

Nebuchadnezzar was given a vision of **“a tree in the midst of the earth and its height was great,”** which Daniel interpreted as the king and his dominion, that is, the Babylonian kingdom (Daniel 4:10; 20-22).

To teach His disciples the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, Jesus spoke the parable of the mustard seed that became a great tree.

(31) He put another parable before them, saying: The kingdom of Heaven is compared to a grain of mustard, which taking, a man sowed in his field; (32) which indeed is less than all the seeds, but when it is grown it is greater than the plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and roost in its branches. (Matthew 13:31-32 LITV)

Jesus also referred to the bad figs of the Judahite nation that rejected Him as a barren (no fruit) fig tree (Matthew 21:19-20; 24:32; Mark 11:13-14, 20-21; 13:28; Luke 13:6-9). As if to make it abundantly clear that trees refer to nations, Luke records Jesus referring to all the trees.

(29) And He spoke a parable to them: You see the fig tree and all the trees. (30) Now when they sprout leaves, seeing it, you will know from yourselves that now the summer is near. (Luke 21:29-30 LITV)

“All the trees” refers to all the nations that came into being after the cursed and barren fig tree [leaves only] reappeared on the world stage in 1948 and, by extension, all the nations of the world. All will be judged together, for they all have rejected Jesus as King of Judah.

However, the first indication that trees refer to nations is given in one of, possibly, the oldest parables in the world, as spoken by Jotham to the men of Shechem.

(8) “Once the trees went forth to anoint a king over them, and they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us!’ (9) “But the olive tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my fatness with which God and men are honored, and go to wave over the trees?’ (10) “Then the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You come, reign over us!’ (11) “But the fig tree said to them, ‘Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to wave over the trees?’ (12) “Then the trees said to the vine, ‘You come, reign over us!’ (13) “But the vine said to them, “Shall I leave my new wine, which cheers God and men, and go to wave over the trees?’ (14) “Finally all the trees said to the bramble, ‘You come, reign over us!’ (15) “The bramble said to the trees, ‘If in truth you are anointing me as king over you, come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, may fire come out from the bramble and consume the cedars of Lebanon.” (Judges 9:8-15 NASB)

In this parable, on one level, the trees are a people seeking a king, but on another level, the trees themselves represent a nation of people seeking another kingdom or nation to reign over them. In this case, the ruling nations are represented as the olive tree, the fig tree, the vine, and the bramble.

In my opinion, this seems to have some prophetic significance regarding the progression of the kingdoms of the earth from the greatest to the least. The olive tree is the best of the kingdoms or nations and the bramble is the worst. Another way of looking at it is that it is a prophetic picture of the degradation of the nations of the earth. It starts with the olive tree and digresses to the fig tree, which produces both good and bad figs, and then digresses further to a vine and then a bramble, which aren't trees at all. A *vine* is "any plant with a long, thin stem that grows along the ground or climbs a wall or other support by means of tendrils, etc." A *bramble* is "a prickly shrub." The word *prickly* refers to anything that is "stinging, smarting, or tingling."

At the end of Man's Day, the nations will be nothing but a bramble in the sight of God, for they have rejected God's King (Psalm 2).

It is also my opinion that the olive tree is closer to the Tree of Life than all the other trees, and all mankind will eventually be grafted into this tree, which signifies the birthright and fruitfulness. Perhaps we could say that the olive tree is a type of the Tree of Life.

(17) But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, (18) do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. (Romans 11:17-18 NASB)

Later, Paul went on to declare that **all Israel shall be saved** (Romans 11:26) and that **God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all** (Romans 11:32). Why? Because He wills that not only shall all Israel be saved, which refers to the lost house of Israel that holds the birthright, but all men as well, so that all shall come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4) and all shall be reconciled through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20). What a glorious gospel! Again, why? **For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things** (Romans 11:36).

Now, going back further to the very beginning of mankind, we know that the fig tree was there amongst the many trees of the garden, for Adam and Eve made a fig-apron to cover their nakedness after eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:7). Thus, the fig tree, in the guise of the fig-apron, became a symbol of covering or, more specifically, covering of nakedness, which signifies mortality, which, in turn, signifies sin, for sin reigns (exists) in mortal bodies (Romans 5:12; 6:12). Paul makes the point: **For indeed in this house** (mortal body) **we groan, longing to be clothed** (immortality) **with our dwelling from heaven** (spiritual, celestial, glorified body in the image of the Son of God), **inasmuch as we, having put it on** (in resurrection and transfiguration), **will not be found naked** (mortal) (2 Corinthians 5:2-3 NASB). This is a whole topic unto itself.

But where was the olive tree? Surely, it was there as well, for it speaks of new life, new birth, or a new beginning. After the flood, the dove came to Noah with a leaf from an olive tree. Life had sprung up.

The dove came to him toward evening, and behold, in her beak was a freshly picked olive leaf. So Noah knew that the water was abated from the earth. (Genesis 8:11 NASB)

So, right from the start, God planted the olive tree, which signifies **life** and **a new beginning** or **birth**, and the fig tree, which signifies **covering**. The fig tree, as a covering of sin, is a good thing, but the olive tree, as life itself, is the best, for it speaks of no sin. The Son of God is the Rich Root of the Olive Tree, and He is the Tree of Life, for He has taken away the sin of the world and defeated death. There is no sin in the Tree of Life, for there is no death, only the life of the Son through whom God has birthed One New Man, which is signified by New Jerusalem. When we come to the end of the Bible, we discover the Tree of Life in New Jerusalem. On each side of the **River of the Water of Life** is the **Tree of Life** (Revelation 22:2). Life is everywhere, for this is what New Jerusalem is all about. It is the life of the Son of God manifested in the many sons of God brought unto glory (Hebrews 2:10; Revelation 21:7), seated upon the throne of God as the Lambkin [Head and Body] (Revelation 22:1). Hallelujah!

Remaining with the symbol of the tree as a people, nation, or kingdom, we could say that **New Jerusalem** is the **United Kingdom of Spiritual Israel, the Nation of Life!**