

PLANTS THAT TELL THE WHOLE STORY

Fig, Olive, and Vine

It is fitting to end our study of Bible plants with this important trio. The fig, olive, and vine are mentioned frequently in the Bible, and occur in a variety of circumstances. With this study, however, we notice especially how these three plants give us a complete picture of principle teachings of Scripture that are so necessary to understanding the great salvation of our God.

The Fig (*Ficus carica*) A Reminder of Sin and Shame

The fig is the first plant mentioned in the Bible by name. Sad to say, it situation surrounding it then was not at all good. The reference is Genesis 3:6-7,



When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed *fig leaves* together and made coverings for themselves.

The setting was the Garden of Eden. A place which had been created by God as perfectly good. Adam and Eve, the first people, had been told they could eat the fruit of any tree in the garden except that of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Prodded by the temptations of the devil, Adam and Eve both ate from the forbidden tree and thus committed the first sin against God's holy will. From that moment on, the perfection of the world was ruined. Adam and Eve felt shame and embarrassment for the first time. Prior to sin's entrance into the world, there was no need to feel shame—for in a perfect place, it does not exist. Now the fig leaves which they used to cover their bodies would be a reminder to them of their imperfections—their sin.

Thus the fig reminds us of the seriousness of our sins against the LORD and the trouble that sin brings to us. All the guilt, all the trouble, all the sufferings in the world can be traced



back to the entrance of sin. Even death itself, something God did not originally intend for mankind, is a result of what happened in the garden so many years ago (Rom 6:23). How much we have all done to displease God! What shame we have brought on our own heads by our transgressions! How we need to be relieved of the burden and the effects of our sins!

Bible Search



The fig is mentioned many places in Scripture besides Genesis. Take some time to examine some of these other references:

1 Kgs 4:25
Is 34:4
Hab 3:17-19
Mt 21:19-21
Mt 24:29-33
Mk 11:9-24
Lk 21:29-33
Jn 1:45-51
Jas 3:10-12
Rev 6:13

The Tree — The fig tree is rather and can grow up to 50 feet tall. Generally, however, its height remains in the 10-30 ft range. The bark of the tree is smooth and silvery-grey in color. They are native to the eastern Mediterranean.

The Leaves — The leaves of the fig are quite large and bright green in color. They can reach one foot in length.

The Fruit — A tree in a favorable growing climate will produce two and three crops of figs per year. It is the first crop (summer) that is the sweetest and best of the fruit.

Growth — The fig can be grown as a garden plant. It is easily grown in the south and west, and can be planted in the north as well when winter protection is given.

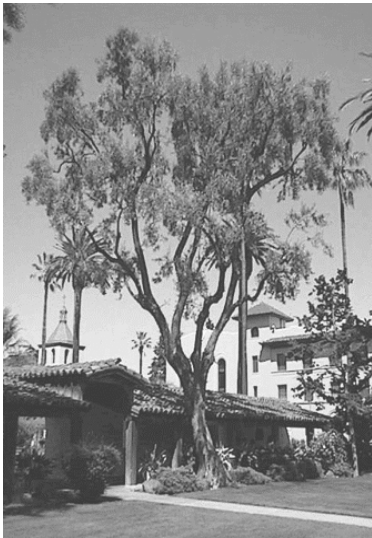
The Olive (*Olea europaea*)

A Reminder of God's Grace, Mercy, and Peace

Over the centuries, the olive branch has become the traditional emblem for peace. In the days of the Great Flood, Noah sent out a dove from the ark to see if the waters had receded. The bird brought back a freshly picked olive leaf and so Noah knew that the water was leaving the earth—the time of judgment on the world was coming to an end and the peace and mercy of God was evident. Psalm 52:8 connects the olive with God's mercy when it says, "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever."

The olive might remind us not only of God's mercy to Noah and His family, but also the mercy, peace, and love He has shown to the whole world through Jesus Christ. Whereas the fig was a reminder of our sins, the olive is a reminder of the peace we have through our Savior. Christ died on the cross to appease the wrath of God that was against us. Paying the full price for our transgressions, Jesus took care of the sin problem, so that we now enjoy a peaceful relationship with our Creator. Rom 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." May the olive leaf remind us of this peace.

The Tree — The olive is a very picturesque tree. With age, its trunk becomes very gnarled and reaches a height of up to 30 feet. A pleasant shade is created by its overhanging branches. The leaves are dark green (1-3 inches long). The blossoms of the tree are small, fragrant, and appear in great abundance on the trees (Job 15:33). The olive thrives in the American southwest where the air is dry. It requires deep, well-drained soil for its deep root system.



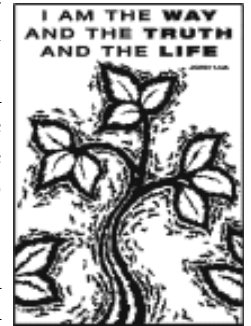
The Oil — One cannot talk about the olive tree without talking about the oil commonly taken from the fruit. Olives are harvested by hand and then pressed to remove the oil. Olive oil is the most widely used oil in the world. In the Old Testament, it was used to light the lamps of the tabernacle while the Israelites were

in the wilderness. An olive oil mixture was also used in religious offerings and in anointing prophets, priests, and kings. High grade oil is used for human consumption, while oil from the damaged fruits is used in such things as cosmetics and soaps. Olive oil, perfumed by saffron and other aromatic plants, was used by the Egyptians and Romans to soften their skin.

The Vine (*Vitis vinifera*)

A Reminder of Our Connection to Jesus

References to the grapevine occur often throughout the Bible. The grape was a major harvest crop in Palestine. The type of vine mentioned in the Bible is the best in the world for producing wine-grapes. Jesus used the picture of vines and vineyard workers in many illustrations and lessons. Here, however, we consider the most well-known reference in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."



Having seen the fig which reminds us of our sin and the olive which reminds us of God's mercy in Christ, the vine shows us how necessary it is for us to *remain connected* to Jesus all the days of our lives. Just as the branches which hold the grapes must stay connected to the main vine in order to receive life-sustaining nutrients, so we must stay connected to Jesus through faith in order to receive that which sustains our spiritual lives. Connected to Jesus, He feeds us with a steady diet of the forgiveness of sins so that we do not lose heart in this world, but rather turn to Him for hope and life.

Resources

Bible Plants for American Gardens, by Eleanor Anthony King

http://www.streetside.com/plants/floridata/ref/f/ficus_c.htm

<http://www.crfp.org/pubs/ff/fig.html>

<http://www.dipbot.unict.it/orio/0076-1.html>

<http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/morton/fig.html>

http://public.fotki.com/geofft/nature_the_great/fs-7.html

<http://codesign.scu.edu/plants/plants/plantsfin/olive001/olive001.htm>