

The Vine in the Old Testament

You [God] brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; it sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the River.

Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it.

Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted. They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.

(Psalm 80:8-16 NRSV)

1. What does the Psalmist say about the Vine's initial state?
2. How does the Psalmist respond to the Vine's misfortune?
3. What does the Psalmist want the Lord to do?

Let me [God] sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with 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 people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

(Isaiah 5:1-7 NRSV)

1. How does the Lord initially treat the vineyard?
2. What is the Lord's attitude towards the vineyard now?
3. What is fruit in this context?

Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars.

Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will break down their altars, and destroy their pillars.

(Hosea 10:1-2 NRSV)

On that day: A pleasant vineyard, sing about it!

I, the LORD, am its keeper; every moment I water it. I guard it night and day so that no one can harm it; I have no wrath.

If it gives me thorns and briars, I will march to battle against it. I will burn it up.

Or else let it cling to me for protection, let it make peace with me, let it make peace with me.

In days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit.

(Isaiah 27:2-6 NRSV)

1. In Hosea, how does Israel respond to its prosperity?
2. How does the Lord respond in these two passages?
3. What does fruit seem to be in these two passages?

Vine and Vineyard in the New Testament

Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.

At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully.

He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, "They will respect my son." But the tenants said to one another, "This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Haven't you read this passage of Scripture:

"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"

Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Mark 12:1-12 NIV

[Jesus said:]

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

"I am the vine; you are the branches.

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

(John 15:1-8 NIV)

Group Activity Questions

1. What do vines or vineyards symbolize in the Old Testament?
2. What do the biblical authors expect from vines?
3. How should we understand what is motivating Jesus in Mark 12 and John 15?
4. In Mark 12 ...
 - a. What are some implications for how we understand what it means to have faith in Jesus that we can draw from your passage?
5. In John 15 ...
 - a. How does Jesus "extend the metaphor"? a.k.a., How is his use of the OT metaphor similar, different, and what is its significance?
 - b. What are some implications for how we understand the importance of good deeds that we can draw from your passage? (See also James 2:14-18).