

To Be Pruned
MAY 2024

The True Vine

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He ^l takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

⁵ "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you ^l will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. John 15:1-8 (NKJV)

THE GREAT VINE

The largest grape vine in the world

The Great Vine, *Vitis vinifera* 'Schiava Grossa' (synonym: Black Hamburg), is now 250 years old and is the *largest grape vine* in the world. It was planted in 1768 while Lancelot 'Capability' Brown was in charge of the gardens at Hampton Court.

The History of The Great Vine

Lancelot 'Capability' Brown directed the planting of the Great Vine from a cutting taken at Valentines Mansion in Essex.

In 1887 it was already 1.2 metres (4') around the base. It is now four metres (13') around the base and the longest rod is 36.5 metres (120').

The Vine is grown on the extension method where one plant fills a glasshouse, as Victorian gardeners thought this method would produce a larger crop.

The average crop of black dessert grapes is about 272 kilograms (600lbs), however in the autumn of 2001 it was 383 kilograms (845 lbs) - the best crop ever. The grapes are ripe after

August Bank Holiday and are sold during the first three weeks of September in the [palace shop](#).

Queen Victoria had grapes from the Great Vine sent to the Royal Household at Windsor or to Osbourne House on the Isle of Wight. The decision to allow them to be sold to visitors was made by Edward VII, who decided the Royal Household no longer needed them. Later they were sold in small wicker baskets at St. Dunstan's, the home for soldiers blinded in the First World War.

In the Second World War German P-O-Ws were given the task of thinning out the bunches of grapes.

The Vine grows on the site of the first greenhouse at Hampton Court. There have been five or six glasshouses on the site throughout its history.

In the early 1900s a three-quarter span wooden glasshouse was built which was a new shape and quite different from what existed before, as this one incorporated a viewing area for the public.

In 1969 a new glasshouse was needed. By that time, the Vine had become so entwined in the existing structure the only way forward was to build a new aluminium glasshouse over the old wooden one. The dormant vine was protected by polythene sheeting and the old glass and its supporting wooden frame was removed, leaving the iron framework of the 20th-century structure and the Vine in place.

The Importance of *Pruning* in The Bible

1. The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). God cut up the languages and trimmed man's pride and arrogance back, encouraging the shape of a diverse people that filled the earth, instead of bunching up in one spot.
2. Moses had a couple of pruning sessions. At the Burning Bush (Exodus 3) his fears got addressed, and later, when he started taking credit (Numbers 20), his presumption earned him another round.
3. King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4). He was warned, but continued in arrogance and pride, and temporarily lost his mind and his kingdom. The day he acknowledged God, he was restored.
4. Saul of Tarsus had to be pruned to become the Paul who spread the Gospel across great distances and wrote so many helpful letters.

(Ezra 1:1) Why were the Jews exiled?

The Jews had **disobeyed** God's law of obeying the **Sabbath**. They had been in the Promised Land for roughly 800 years, and for 490 years, they disobeyed his **Sabbath** rest. The **Sabbath** rest was not only every **seventh day**; it was also every **seventh year**. The Jews were allowed to work the land for **six years**, but on the **seventh year** they had to let the land get a rest. God commanded this because the land needs to recuperate, gaining back its minerals. Also, this was an act of **trust** and **obedience** to God. **The Jews were trusting God's provision by not farming for an entire year.**

Judgment was promised if they **disobeyed** God's **Sabbath** rest: (Lev. 25:2-4; 26:33-35) Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, *'When you come into the land which I shall give you, then the land shall have a sabbath to the LORD. 3 'Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, 4 but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard... 33'You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. 34'Then the land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. 35'All the days of its desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it. (2 Chron. 36:21)* To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its **sabbaths** All the days of its desolation it kept **sabbath** until seventy years were complete.

God promised the Jews that he would kick them out of the land, if they disobeyed him on this:

(Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10-14) This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 12'Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation... "For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. 11'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. 12'Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen

to you. 13‘You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. 14‘I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.’

In the book of Jeremiah, God told the people that he would exile them from the land for 70 years, because this was the amount of time that the Sabbath rest had been disobeyed (490 years total). Here in Ezra, we see that this 70 year period had elapsed, as Daniel had also anticipated (Dan. 9:1-2). Ezra records that God moved King Cyrus to let the people back into the land. *This was truly a supernatural event. Cyrus even returned the gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar had sacked from the Temple in 600 B.C. (Dan. 1).*

Of course, the length of the exile was set because of their disobedience to the **Sabbath**, but this wasn't the primary reason for the exile. The Jews committed idolatry, child sacrifice, and ritual prostitution. This was the reason for being removed from the land.

BIBLE SIGNS AND SYMBOLS (GRAPES)

Grapevines are a plant well suited to the climate of Palestine. Grapes were cultivated as far back as Noah's day (Gen 9:20) and were eaten fresh, dried, or crushed to make juice, vinegar, or wine. In an area where water was often in short supply, the juice from grapes became crucial for life. Clusters of grapes as large as five kilograms (twelve pounds) have been reported in Palestine, giving validity to the spies' account of the grapes in Canaan in **Numbers 13**. The importance of grapes in the Middle Eastern climate and culture made vineyards a symbol of abundance and prosperity. Grapes and the wine they produce were a crucial part of celebrations (Deut 11:14; Jude 9:27; Esther 1:7-8). This role of grapes is underscored by the fact that Nazirites refused grapes as part of their lifestyle of self-denial (Num 6:3). Grapes were symbolic of all the best this world has to offer.

SIN AND JUDGMENT

The failure of a grape crop was evidence of God's judgment (Isa 18:5). Planting a vineyard and then not being able to enjoy it was a portrait of ultimate futility and frustration, but that was the fate promised to sinful Israel (Deut 28:39; Mic 6:15; Zeph 1:13). The sinful life results in poverty and futility, while the righteous life produces abundant harvest and celebration.

Sour grapes are an image of sin in an ancient proverb quoted in Ezekiel 18:2: “Fathers have eaten sour grapes, and their children’s teeth are set on edge.” One of the most notable aspects of sin is that something that promises pleasure turns out to be distasteful and unpleasant, like the experience of biting into sour grape when we expect something sweet.

Sin appears good but leaves a bad taste in the mouth. Of course, children can't literally taste the grapes their parents eat, but metaphorically they suffer for the sins of their parents. One way this happens is when the sins of the fathers are repeated in subsequent generations as children imitate their parents' behaviour.

Faithful Israel is portrayed as a vine that is lovingly tended by God, the **vinedresser**, and produces a bountiful crop (Isa 5). The vine is a symbol for God's providential care and steadfast love toward his people. Yet despite all his loving care, Israel fails to produce a crop (v 2,4). They refuse to act in justice and righteousness (v 7), and so the vineyard is left unprotected to make way for a more productive crop (v 5-6). This is a fitting metaphor for the destruction Israel would suffer at the hands of her enemies as a result of her sin. In the New Testament this image is fleshed out in **John 15, where Jesus himself is the vine**, and Christians who abide in him are **fruitful** branches. **In both uses of the image, grapes not being produced is considered unnatural and the branch is pruned until it bears fruit.** Just as a grapevine should produce grapes, Christians should produce sweet spiritual fruit. The presence of spiritual fruit is evidence of God's blessing and work in the life of a believer, and the absence of fruit brings judgment and suffering with the end goal of bringing forth a harvest.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. -John 15:1-2

Our Response to Pain Proves What Type of Branch We Are

Try as we might, no one can avoid getting cut or **pruned** by God in this life. God touches everyone, and many times his touch hurts. How we respond to these trials will be the evidence of what type of wound we have received. God cuts everyone but everyone who is cut does not experience the same outcome.

God Prunes or Cuts All Branches

There are two and only two choices in life when it feels like we are being severed in half. All the millions of difficulties that will make us bleed on planet earth can be used to draw us closer to God so we bear more fruit, or these hurts will turn out to be our final knockout blow.

The variable in life is not if you will experience tragedy, relational heartache, or suffering. These things are a given. You will not escape this life unscathed. If you breathe the oxygen on planet earth you are going to breathe the pain of a broken planet no matter how hard you try to avoid it.

The variable to life comes after the initial blow. Once you get punched in the face by life and you're lying on the ground, wondering how you got there, the next choice you make will be the great determining factor to what type of cut you just received from God.

Our Choices Show If We Were Pruned or Cut Off

If you run away or get up only to hurt the world like it just hurt you, then you are taking the path of becoming an un-pruned branch that is picked up and thrown into the fire by God. But if you choose to use the pain as a **catalyst** towards Christ, if you desire what God desires in that the difficulties are drawing you closer to God rather than farther apart – then the cut you received will turn out to be God **pruning** you because you are **fruitful** branch.

God cuts off the branches that do not glorify him and he **prunes** the branches that are **glorifying** him so that they will **glorify** him more. When you are a branch that is cut off, you will know it because you will no longer be connected to Christ. But if you are pruned then your connection with Christ will eventually become even stronger as God cuts away the excess in your life that is hindering your connection to Jesus.

No Branch Can Avoid Being Cut by God, But We Can Avoid Being Cut Off

The obvious fact, however, is that God is going to cut us. This cut will either separate us from God as our sinful responses choose, or his cut will sanctify us so our aim of pleasing God will be **pruned** and thus more effective.

Whether sliced off or pruned, it always hurts when you are cut. Pain is not a variable for the dead branch or the pruned branch. The variable comes in the form of our choice to either remain on the ground to shrivel up and die or to seek the healing of a deeper walk with Christ through the cut. This choice will be the evidence of what type of branch we are.

You cannot avoid being cut deeply in this life, but you can avoid being cut off. May we seek the grace and healing of Jesus Christ so that through the pain we will bring God more glory than if we were not cut at all.

This is God's hope for us, that *“every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. . . . By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:2, 8).*

Pain doesn't prove anything. But when you are pruned, this proves God is working in your life as you grow to glorify him more.

SOURCES

The Great Vine

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Why were the Jews exiled?

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Pruning in the Bible: 1 Important but Challenging Topic

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