Ezekiel 15:1-8

1And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, 2Son of man, what is the vine-tree more than any tree, the vine-branch which is among the trees of the forest? 3Shall wood be taken thereof to make any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? 4Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire hath devoured both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned: is it profitable for any work? 5Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work: how much less, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned, shall it yet be meet for any work! 6Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah: 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. 7And I will set my face against them; they shall go forth from the fire, but the fire shall devour them; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah, when I set my face against them. 8And I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, saith the Lord Jehovah (ASV, 1901).

IS THE VINE TREE BETTER

This chapter as well as the next two discusses the Lord statements in parabolic form regarding the demise of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. As has been the case in the first major section of the Book of Ezekiel this parable takes place during the last days of king Zedekiah. Chapter 17:15 let’s us know that they were hoping for some aid from Edom, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon and lastly Egypt. It was not to come from any of these countries. The vine tree is a type of the people of Israel. Because of the importance of wine production in the ancient Mediterranean world, illustration derived from vines, vineyards, grapes, or drinking were common. God uses many agricultural images to explain the concepts He want us to understand. He frequently refers to the people of Israel being like a vine. In Numbers 13:23, the vine appears as a sign of the richness of Canaan; in Judges 9:12–13 Jotham’s fable tells of the noble vine. In Genesis 49:11, the vine represents the blessing of the tribe of Judah bringing the Messiah and the Messianic Age, and the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5:1–7 discusses God’s description of the apostate Israel. In Psalm 80:8–19 there is a lengthy comparison of Israel with a vine stock. Israel is the luxuriant vine in Hosea 10:1, and also in the imagery of the nation Israel in Ezekiel 17:5–10 and 19:10–14.

Ezekiel 15:1-2

1And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, 2Son of man, what is the vine-tree more than any tree, the vine-branch which is among the trees of the forest (ASV, 1901)?
This verse starts out with a sort of riddle or rhetorical question. God is essentially asking, “How is the vine branch better than any other tree’s branch?” Since God frequently uses the vine branch to refer to the Nation Israel and its people it is obvious that He is making reference to them here too. Why is the wood of the vine tree better than any other tree? The simple answer is only because of the fruit it can produce. This chapter will tell us of all the other reasons that the vine is useless. Its only value is the fruit it produces. Our Lord Jesus made a similar comparison to the Church as the branches of the vine tree and He being the true vine. He provides the nourishment for us to produce fruit in the form of bringing others to Jesus, teaching His morality and message to the world regarding His Kingdom. It is only through trust in God that He provides the blessings to His chosen. We must recognize how feeble we are apart from Him as he says, “without me ye can do nothing.”

John 15:5

5I 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 (KJV).

The same holds true for Israel. They did not want to be under the protection and love of God. So He punished them. Israel is hopelessly ruined as this chapter shows through the imagery of the vine.

**THE USELESSNESS OF THE VINE**

Ezekiel 15:3

3Shall wood be taken thereof to make any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon (ASV, 1901)?

God through Ezekiel continues to make rhetorical questions to the Jews. He asks if the wood of the vine can be used for any projects, which need to be made from wood.
The obvious answer is no. Because of its twisted tangled nature it has no value for projects. Regarded as timber it is worthless. The particular tree mentioned here is not fruit bearing but a wild vine that grows in the forest. It is inferior because it is non-fruit bearing and produces no wood, which can be used as timber. In fact God goes on to say that it is useless to even make pegs upon which to hang things. Its twisting, gnarled branches can’t even be made into a stout peg for hanging objects. The Lord’s message is clear. The Nation Israel apart from Him had little value. The people of Israel had become infected by sin. Now Jerusalem had no value. Degenerate Israel was less valuable than the heathen nations around them. God would carry out His judgment in accordance with His true character. The Israelites were no longer producing any fruit for Him and He would punish them. Whether we realize it or not we are completely dependent upon God. He created us, the earth, and the environment in which we live. He gives us food, air to breath and materials for shelter as well as the necessary implements we use in our daily life. When we neglect to affirm our need for Him we fail to reach the potential He has for us in our lives as believers. This was true of ancient Israel and for the true Church today. When we are barren of spiritual fruitfulness, we become a toxic institution. We become so self serving that just like the ancient Israelites we are useless to God. The Church of Jesus Christ is no better than man centered political clubs, scientific societies and chambers of commerce. These so-called secular institutions are superior to a degenerate Church. The fallen Christian is lower than the “man of the world,” and of less use to society, as the fruitless vine is of less account than the forest tree. Failing to realize the need to give God all of our attention will result in dire circumstances. Israel is an example for us to be warned with.

GOOD ONLY FOR BURNING

Ezekiel 15:4

4Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire hath devoured both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned: is it profitable for any work (ASV, 1901)?

When the vine tree is not producing fruit and not about to do so it’s only value it to cast into the fire and burn. The Lord says, “Behold, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire hath devoured both the ends of it, and the midst of it is burned.” It has failed in fruit bearing; it is useless as timber; there remains only one possible use for it. Cast into the furnace or fireplace it may serve as firewood. The imagery here is profound. The fruitless vine can’t continue to stand. While it is occupying space and taking in nutriment from the soil, as well as casting shade it retards growth to plants that will produce. The Lord Jesus told a parable of the necessity of eliminating a non-fruit bearing tree.


6And he spake this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit thereon, and found none. 7And he said unto the vinedresser, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why doth it also cumber the ground? 8And he answering saith unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: 9and if it bear fruit thenceforth, well; but if not, thou shalt cut it down (ASV, 1901).
A fruitless Church stands in the place of a useful one, and therefore it is positively harmful. There is no good that can come from it except that it will be destroyed. The very destruction of it may be a warning to others. Unfaithful souls are preparing for themselves a fate of destruction. Negative fruitlessness is enough to doom them as the Lord Jesus said in the parable of the talents.

Matthew 25:30

30 And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth (ASV, 1901).

Ezekiel 15:5

5 Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work: how much less, when the fire hath devoured it, and it is burned, shall it yet be meet for any work (ASV, 1901).

God summarizes the preceding verses by saying that the vine only had one function and other than that it was useless for any work. Now that the fire has devoured it there is absolutely no value inherent in it. Now that its intended purpose has failed to produce its only other value is to become firewood. Therefore it is devoured.

GOD WILL CAST JERUSALEM INTO THE FIRE

Ezekiel 15:6-8

6 Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah: 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. 7 And I will set my face against them; they shall go forth from the fire, but the fire shall devour them; and ye shall know that I am Jehovah, when I set my face against them. 8 And I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, saith the Lord Jehovah (ASV, 1901).

God clearly states the end result of apostate Israel. Because they did not produce the appropriate fruit they were lovingly ordained to He will give them to the fire for fuel. Again he states that because of this fiery punishment they will come to know Him. Jerusalem will become desolate as a result of their gross sins.

Mankind is created to glorify God. When we fail to produce the proper love and obedience to Him we have no value and must be cast off. The most severe is to be cast into outer darkness for all eternity because we did not heed the call to salvation. The Lord gave a parallel passage of Scripture to this one in Ezekiel, which is found in Isaiah chapter 5. It is characterized as a song, which Isaiah sang about God’s development and care for His vineyard, Israel.

Isaiah 5:1-30
Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he digged 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 hewed out a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor hoed; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness, but, behold, a cry.

Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land! In mine ears saith Jehovah of hosts, Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah. Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that tarry late into the night, till wine inflame them! And the harp and the lute, the tabret and the pipe, and wine, are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of Jehovah, neither have they considered the operation of his hands.

Therefore my people are gone into captivity for lack of knowledge; and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude are parched with thirst. Therefore Sheol hath enlarged its desire, and opened its mouth without measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth among them, descend into it. And the mean man is bowed down, and the great man is humbled, and the eyes of the lofty are humbled: but Jehovah of hosts is exalted in justice, and God the Holy One is sanctified in righteousness. Then shall the lambs feed as in their pasture, and the waste places of the fat ones shall wanderers eat.

Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, and sin as it were with a cart rope; that say, Let him make speed, let him hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it! Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink; that justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

Therefore as the tongue of fire devoureth the stubble, and as the dry grass sinketh down in the flame, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their
blossom shall go up as dust; because they have rejected the law of Jehovah of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. 25 Therefore is the anger of Jehovah kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them; and the mountains tremble, and their dead bodies are as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

26 And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss for them from the end of the earth; and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly. 27 None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken: 28 whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent; their horses’ hoofs shall be accounted as flint, and their wheels as a whirlwind: 29 their roaring shall be like a lioness, they shall roar like young lions; yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and carry it away safe, and there shall be none to deliver. 30 And they shall roar against them in that day like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold, darkness and distress; and the light is darkened in the clouds thereof (ASV, 1901).

God judged Israel for her sins against Him. He will judge all nations as well for how they honored Him.

NEXT MESSAGE: THE LORD IS GRACEFUL, JERUSALEM IS UNFAITHFUL
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