

# Joseph and Fruit Bearing

*“Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel).”*  
—Genesis 49:22-24

Gen. 2:17; Rev. 22:2,14) We also read of the palm

**THE SCRIPTURES FRE-**quently refer to things of nature as illustrations of spiritual truths. For our encouragement, let our thoughts for a while be among the trees and boughs, the wells and springs which are so often seen to be the emblems of spiritual life and growth. The psalmist speaks of a righteous man as “a tree planted by the rivers of water.” Jesus said, “I am the vine, ye are the branches.” Genesis speaks of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” John the Revelator speaks of “the tree of life,” and of those having a right to its fruit. (Ps. 1:3; John 15:5;

tree; the cedars of Lebanon; the olive and fig trees, and many others which are used in the Scriptures as symbols of various characteristics of individuals and nations.

## **JACOB'S BLESSINGS**

Jacob, at the end of his days, called for his sons, that before his death he might confer blessings upon them and give them certain warnings. Through his long experience he had closely observed the peculiar and varying characteristics of his family, which, of course, is quite natural for parents to do. He was probably able to determine measurably the course each would take in life, and consequently the results which would follow the fruitage of their lives.

Jacob's strong faith and hope in the promises of God would encourage him to anticipate their fulfillment in, and upon, his twelve sons. He sought to confer his blessings and counsel upon them as indicated by Jehovah's guidance. Thus he encouraged them to look for the fulfillment of those treasured promises made to him, and to his father and grandfather, Isaac and Abraham, that through their "seed" all the nations of the earth would be blessed.—Gen. 12:2,3; 22:18

Undoubtedly the spirit of prophecy was also with Jacob, enabling him to make such statements of his sons as recorded in Genesis chapter 49, which years afterward were fulfilled in the various tribes of Israel, though the complete fulfillment of the greatest promise to Father Abraham is yet future. Of Joseph, Jacob declared he was a "fruitful bough"—fruitful in the faith, in confidence of his God, and in the divine promises to the fathers. Joseph was

truly a fruitful bough in the family tree and in his services to them as well as in his office as ruler of Egypt under Pharaoh.

## **PROPERLY RIPENED FRUIT**

The glory of a fruit-bearing tree is its seasonable fruit, ripened according to its proper time. Fruit artificially ripened is not long-keeping. Fruit ripened out of season is often less appealing and tasteless. Such is like us if we seek to produce fruitage of character acceptable to God by our own will, power, and control. Fruitage acceptable to God is the outgrowth of submission to his will. It is he who is working in us “both to will and to do of his good pleasure,” by discipline and through our sincerity. Only thus can we become “filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”—Phil. 2:13; 1:11

Joseph, throughout his life, manifested a pleasing disposition, generally favorable to all. Tactful, uncomplaining under the most trying experiences, he seems to have borne much fruit in his contact and service to, and for, others. Perhaps we also would be strengthened in such privileges if we observed more closely Joseph’s example, as expressed in Paul’s exhortation, “Be instant in season, [and] out of season,” in our zeal and love for the Lord and his kingdom.—II Tim. 4:2

Joseph was fruitful in his character and deportment in the prison life with the baker, butler, and jailer, and he was quickly raised to authority above the other prisoners. (Gen. 39:21-23; 40:1-23) When imprisoned he might have been justifiably sour or indignant, but he retained sweetness and helpfulness

to those about him. Think of Joseph's integrity, honor, and humility when accosted by Potiphar's wife, and his response to her: "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9) If we could think of our omissions and commissions as against God rather than against ourselves or others, what a power for overcoming temptation! No one "liveth to himself," and the influence of Joseph's life has been a torch of light and life to others.—Rom. 14:7,8

Jesus said, for our benefit and encouragement, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16) Our Lord also confirmed the need of consistency of character in righteousness. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."—Matt. 7:16-20

## **ELEMENTS NECESSARY FOR GOOD FRUITS**

Three elements play important roles with regard to successful fruit bearing. First, the condition of the tree and its source of life and nutriment; second, the elements, such as sun, rain, wind and temperature; third, sufficient time for fruitage development. All who accept the life of faith find similar necessary steps in their development. First, there is one's heart condition before God, the source of spiritual food to give and sustain faith; second, the varied experiences

and elements of daily life; and third, patient waiting, trusting, confidence and perseverance.

Joseph was a fruitful bough, or branch, “by a well,” our text says. Another reason for the fruitfulness of a tree and its boughs is the position of its roots. The roots symbolize our faith, “grounded in love.” (Eph. 3:17) Where faith is firmly rooted in the Word of God, and in Christ, growth, foliage, and fruit are certain. A living faith in the Word of God, based on love, is a wellspring of life.—John 4:14

The resources and power of mighty seas and oceans feed the wellsprings of the earth. Joseph drew his sustaining power, his encouragement in enduring faith and comfort, from one mightier than oceans. We likewise receive our spiritual sustenance and the life-giving water of Truth from our glorified and all-powerful Lord. How true his statement: “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”—John 6:63

As a fruitful bough, Joseph would appreciate that the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and his father Jacob, were for future fulfillment, and accordingly he would treasure them. He would perceive something of the extent to which these promises would reach to all the families of the earth, outside and beyond the Israelites. Joseph would muse over, and meditate upon, their outworking upon nations and men. They would satisfy his mind and heart and would be to him a glorious hope of life and prosperity, and their fulfillment he would continually seek to visualize. All this is implied in his request that his bones be taken out of Egypt upon his death to the land promised to Abraham and his father Jacob. (Gen. 50:25; Heb. 11:22) Indeed, Joseph is included

in the apostle's remarks: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."—Heb. 11:13

The meditation of Joseph on the promises of God is substantiated by his remarks to his brethren when disclosing to them that he was their brother whom they sold into the hands of the Ishmaelites. He said, "Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." (Gen. 45:5) Such an assertion could come only from a heart strongly convinced of God's overruling providence and a faith firmly rooted in, and grasping tenaciously, the divine promises. Thus we are reminded that our faith must be firmly embedded in Christ Jesus and sustained by the Word of God—the water of Truth—and so take the same stand of righteousness by faith as did Joseph. All our experiences should thus be viewed from the divine perspective.

## **BRANCHES OVER THE WALL**

Joseph was a fruitful bough, "whose branches run over the wall," suggesting unlimited growth. Imagine a fruit tree by a well with roots reaching down into its bed. A well gets its water not from the surface only; it does not depend entirely on rain. Its main resources are from underground streams. Only a fruit tree with such a bountiful supply of water can spread its branches over and down a wall, and thus produce fruitage in great abundance.

Symbolically speaking, Joseph lived daily by a wellspring, which to him was life indeed. He could

say, like the psalmist, “All my springs are in thee.” (Ps. 87:7) Joseph’s constant faith, manifested in so many of his experiences, beautifully illustrates for us our spiritual life and growth as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Only as we abide in him by faith, and in meditation on his Word and life, can we grow spiritually and produce the abundant fruitage our Heavenly Father desires to find in us. Such fruit will honor him, as Jesus disclosed to his disciples, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.”—John 15:1-8

## **INTERNAL GROWTH**

A tree’s growth is first internal, then external. Let us ever remember that our life as New Creatures in Christ is first that of the heart, the will, and the intention. The Scriptures say, “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” (Rom. 10:10) Justifying faith is more than an outward conviction of truth. James wrote: “The devils also believe, and tremble.” (James 2:19) Rather, justifying faith is an operation of the heart, from which emanates one’s affections and motivations.

That faith which assures one of righteousness; that brings conviction that a covenant has been agreed upon; and that gives a deep sense of peace and rest as well as fellowship with God, is an operation of one’s heart. The Apostle Paul says, “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 14:17) The apostle’s enumeration of the fruits of the Spirit, though encompassing the need for outward action in word and deed, begins internally with the heart development of the qualities of “love,

joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”—Gal. 5:22,23

## **THE LIFE OF FAITH**

“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” the apostle says. (Rom. 10:17) Having received God’s Word into “hearing ears,” and the mind assenting to its verity and reasonableness, the heart then imbibes these truths so that they become part of our innermost affections. The life of faith is far more than a mere acceptance of doctrine which we consider scriptural and therefore true. It is the assimilation of that which we have learned and proven, so that its principles become our guideposts, and its promises become our inspiration. By this process, then, we are enabled to “live by faith.”—Heb. 10:38

It is manifest in the Scriptures that fruitage acceptable to God emanates from Christ Jesus, his word and his example. The Apostle John said, “Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”—I John 2:5,6

## **SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

Growth in spiritual qualities and traits can only be produced by wholehearted submission and obedience to God. Through the Lord’s grace and by the influence of the Holy Spirit, begotten within, we are transformed and renewed in the spirit of our minds. (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23) It is those righteous virtues, which are the product of the Holy Spirit working within us, that will enable us to manifest the fruitage that God is looking for in us as followers

of his dear Son—fruitful branches of the true vine. “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. . . . And above all these things put on charity,” or love.—Col. 3:12-14

Fruitage of character is developed amid the trials and sometimes opposition of daily life, especially so as the roots of faith and hope are well embedded in the wellspring, Christ and his Word. We can discern this being worked out in the various particulars of life. For example, think of Jesus’ statement, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matt. 5:5) Who are the meek? Where is meekness seen? When is there opportunity for manifesting meekness? Such opportunities come chiefly in circumstances of difficulty or perhaps provocation. There is little cause for developing meekness if the will is never challenged, or where there are none of the jars and collisions of daily life. There can be little manifestation of meekness without a greater or lesser degree of opposition in some form.

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matt. 5:7) Here we see that mercy is not merely goodness or forgiveness, but it is goodness in the face of our own weaknesses and the need for mercy ourselves. God is longsuffering and of great mercy, “abundant in goodness and truth, . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” (Exod. 34:6,7) “Be ye therefore merciful,” says Jesus, “as your Father also is merciful.”—Luke 6:36

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:3) This implies the emptying of conceit with regard to our own strength,

goodness and wisdom. It is to feel that apart from God's grace we are nothing, and to humbly realize that even with our best resolves we will likely come up short due to the weaknesses of our fallen flesh. The Apostle Paul confessed, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing."—Rom. 7:18

This is the grace—"poor in spirit"—that Jesus mentions first in his Sermon on the Mount. It lays at the foundation of all other graces and is matured and confirmed as we meet the difficulties and challenges of our daily life with an overcoming spirit. The apostle says, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."—Rom. 8:36,37

How important it is, then, to continually heed the apostle's exhortation: "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."—Eph. 6:10-13

## **FRUITAGE IN CHRIST**

Reminding ourselves again of our opening verses, Joseph was truly an example of faith, and a fruitful bough in all his experiences through life. He was a fruitful bough by a well, whose fruit-bearing branches ran over the wall, radiating light and truth to others. The archers, his enemies, sorely

grieved him, shot at him, and hated him; but his bow and his arms of service were made strong by the hands of the almighty God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.—Gen. 49:22-24

The objective of our quest is fruitage in Christ. It is not merely the blossoms of profession or confession that we are his. It begins with faith in his redeeming sacrifice on our behalf, and sincerity of devotion fostered by an honest heart. It continues with a desire to be like him in all his virtues, character qualities and examples of loving service to those around him.

Jesus was ever seeking to make these matters clear to his disciples; to earnest inquirers such as Nicodemus; to the rich young ruler; even to the scribes and Pharisees—to all within hearing of his words of life. To Nicodemus he said, “Ye must be born again.” (John 3:3-8) To the young man running to him and saying, What must I do? Jesus said that if he was sincere in his inquiry, he should sell his goods, give to the poor, and then “follow me.” (Matt. 19:16-21) To the Pharisees he said, “Render ... unto God the things that are God’s.”—Matt. 22:21

Let us remember that life is more than meat, more than nutriment for the body, and more than raiment. The vessel containing life, the “inner man”—the heart, motives and will—is to be cherished more than outward adornment or show. (Matt. 6:25; Eph. 3:16) Thus may we “labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.” (John 6:27) “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”—John 15:8 ■