

The Fruit of the Fifth Year

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It is because God made a promise to Abraham, that his descendants, who comprised the nation of Israel, inherited a tremendously valuable territory. They did nothing that could be construed as honorable, or worthy, in order to receive this gift. Instead, the promise was made and the inheritance was freely given to them due to the faith of their forefather Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:5-7; 17:2-8). Nevertheless, there were various laws, commands, and ordinances that these descendants of Abraham were expected to obey as a bare minimum for the great blessing that God had bestowed upon them. One of these ordinances involved the produce that would be grown in this land,

When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised (unclean). Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. ²⁴But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the Lord (i.e. dedicated to God). ²⁵And **in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase:** I am the Lord your God (Lev. 19:23-25; NKJV throughout unless otherwise noted; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

There are physical benefits to obeying this law, however, there are more important spiritual lessons associated with this command. As the apostle Paul pointed out, God's laws are first and foremost spiritual in nature, For we know that the law is spiritual... (Rom. 7:14a).

From a purely physical point of view, it is important to protect and nurture an immature fruit tree for the first few years of its growth. During these formative years, a tree needs to develop its root and stem system in order to produce good fruit. Removing any fruit during

these formative years, takes nutrients away from the root and stem growth. Interestingly, based on various factors such as weather and soil conditions, the University of Connecticut, Department of Extension, estimates that a plum tree needs to be between four and six years old before its fruit reaches maturity. Therefore, care needs to be taken not to harvest a newly planted tree for the first few years.

This is valuable information that God already knew before He created the earth, and that is why He gave the command in Leviticus 19:23-25 to ancient Israel. However, as God's laws are spiritual, they always portray important spiritual realities. In this study some of these spiritual truths will be examined.

When a seed is planted, it will always do better if it is placed in fertile soil,

But the one sown on good land (i.e. fertile), this is he who hears the word (of Almighty God) and understands it; who then bears fruit, and indeed makes sometimes a hundred, and sometimes sixty, and sometimes thirty (Mt. 13:23; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Again, there is a process involved where a seed is planted and it requires good soil, moisture, sunlight, and time to grow into a mature plant. The apostle Paul explained these stages from a spiritual perspective,

I (Paul) planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. ⁷So then neither he who plants is anything (in comparison to Almighty God), nor is he who waters, **but God who gives the increase** (1Cor. 3:6-7; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

Paul is reminding those who are involved with doing God's work, that they are merely

instruments that can be used by God as He calls individuals to repent of sin and start a new life of obedience to Him (cf. Rom. 6:4),

...the goodness of (Almighty) God leads you to repentance (Rom. 2:4b).

When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, 'Then **God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life**' (Ac. 11:18; emphasis added).

Jesus Christ made it abundantly plain that no one could begin producing good fruit unless his heavenly Father initiated the process leading to their repentance,

No one is able to come toward me (Christ), **except the Father, the One having sent me, draw him** (Jn. 6:44a; RNT; Ed. note in parenthesis).

And he (Christ) was saying, "**For this reason I have** (already) **said to you, that no one is able to come toward me except it is granted to him from the Father** (Jn. 6:65; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses).

So by combining what Paul said with Christ's comments, we may conclude that an individual cannot begin to correctly understand Almighty God unless He initiates the process that leads to repentance of sin. God can use human beings as His instruments in this process, but these same people cannot take credit for producing good fruit. The production of good fruit is a direct result of the action of God's Holy Spirit in the life of an obedient servant. Therefore, only God gets the credit for any good fruit in the lives of those He is working with. Paul said as much in the next scripture,

For we (repentant believers) are His (Almighty God's) workmanship, created in Christ Jesus

(through his sacrifice) for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10; Ed. notes in parentheses).



...THE GOODNESS OF (ALMIGHTY)
GOD LEADS YOU TO REPENTANCE.

Romans 2:4b

It is important for those God is working with to be planted in good soil, figuratively speaking. If they are on rocky ground or soil that is covered in weeds, they will not produce good fruit. In this context, Christ emphasized that anyone influenced by erroneous teaching must reject it if they expect to produce good fruit. Christ corrected the religious leaders of his day for their false teachings, which placed anyone hearing these falsehoods into poor soil, figuratively speaking (cf. Mt. 13:19-22),

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you go about the sea and the dried out lands to make one proselyte, and when it happens (he is convinced through their erroneous teachings), **you make him a son of Gehenna** (SGD 1067; a continuously burning rubbish pit in a valley South of Jerusalem where the bodies of dead criminals and animals were cast out from the city and burned) **twofold more than you** (Mt. 23:15; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses).

In contrast, if someone receives God's truth in fertile soil, He expects them to grow and produce good fruit,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness (meekness), self-control, against such there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Based on the fruit tree being left for four years, so that it produces better fruit, it appears that God will work with those He has called for a period of time in the hope they continue to repent of sin as well as growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (i.e. follow Christ's example in word and deed; cf. 2Pet. 3:18). However, as God does not force anyone to make choices against their own free will, there is the possibility that some will reject God's truth during the period of their calling. Christ illustrated this metaphorically through the example of a fig tree that refused to bear fruit. As a fig tree is used in scripture to symbolize the nation of Israel, the following text can be applied both individually as well as nationally (cf. Hos. 9:10),

And he (Christ) was telling this parable, "Someone had planted a fig tree in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and did not find any. ⁷And he said to his vineyard worker, 'Behold, for three years I came seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I do not find any. [Therefore] cut it down. Why also does it make the earth useless?' ⁸But having answered he said to him, 'Lord, allow it this year too, until I dig around it and throw manure on it; ⁹and if indeed it might bear fruit in the future; but if not, you shall cut it down' (Lk. 13:6-9; RNT; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

In this parable, Christ was referring to the law in Leviticus 19:23 which stated that no one was to eat from the fruit trees for three years. However, the fruit trees were still expected to begin producing something during these three formative years because the fruit of the fourth year was to be dedicated to God (Lev. 19:24). Therefore, the keeper of this vineyard requested another year to fertilize and aureate it so that fruit would be available for dedication to God by the fourth year. According to Luke 13:9, if the fig tree did not have any fruit by the fourth year, it was to be removed.

In a similar scriptural example, Christ cursed a fig tree to death. This had spiritual significance because he came seeking fruit from his own people, but found none. As a result, salvation became available en masse to the Gentile nations,

Now in the morning, when he (Christ) returned to the city, he became hungry.¹⁹And seeing a single fig tree on the way, he came to it, and found nothing on it except leaves only; and he said to it, "No longer shall fruit be produced from you – into the age." And the fig tree instantly dried up.²⁰And the disciples seeing this, marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree instantly dry up?" (Mt. 21:18-10; RNT; Ed. note in parenthesis).

In a similar manner, if someone is called by Almighty God and they reject His truth, they will be cut off until the second resurrection. Any truth that had been revealed to them will be removed. This principle was applied, in a national sense, to the descendants of ancient Israel. Today, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not a single nation under God's governance. Instead, the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob are scattered among many nations and today they observe the pagan customs they have learned within their respective nations. This was the point that Christ was making when he cursed the fig tree. The nation of Israel had been given plenty of time to produce good fruit, but due to continual disobedience they never did. Therefore, they were removed and the opportunity they had, to be one nation under Almighty God, was taken away.

On a positive note, those who grow in understanding God's way of life, and through obedience to Him begin producing good fruit, will be a blessing to others. This is the spiritual lesson behind the fruit trees in Leviticus 19:23-25. Just as the physical fruit from trees benefits everyone who is nourished by them; so the

spiritual fruit produced by God's people can be a blessing to others.

When God works with people over a period of time, pictured symbolically by the four years when no fruit is to be eaten from the trees, His goal is to bring them to the point of spiritual maturity where they can assist others with a better understanding of God's way of life. Anyone able to assist others in this manner has fulfilled what the fifth year represents from a spiritual perspective. This explains why God told Adam that he could eat from all, but one, of trees in the Garden of Eden. When this command was given, these trees would have been a blessing to Adam while the one tree that did not bear good fruit would not,

And the Lord God commanded the man (Adam), saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat (partake of, as in fellowship); ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (symbolizing Satan's way of reasoning) you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it (partake of, as in fellowship; cf. 2Cor. 6:14) you shall surely die (Gen. 2:16-17; Ed. notes in parentheses).

It is God's will that everyone bear good fruit, but His plan does this progressively. Between now and the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation, those who are growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ have a greater responsibility to assist those who are still under the influence of the god of this present evil age (2Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-3; Gal. 1:4),

And from everyone to whom much has been given (through God's workmanship in their lives), **much will be required from him; and to whom much was entrusted** (in the form of understanding and acting upon God's truth), **they will ask** (require) **all the more** (Lk. 12:48b; RNT; Ed. notes in parentheses).

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