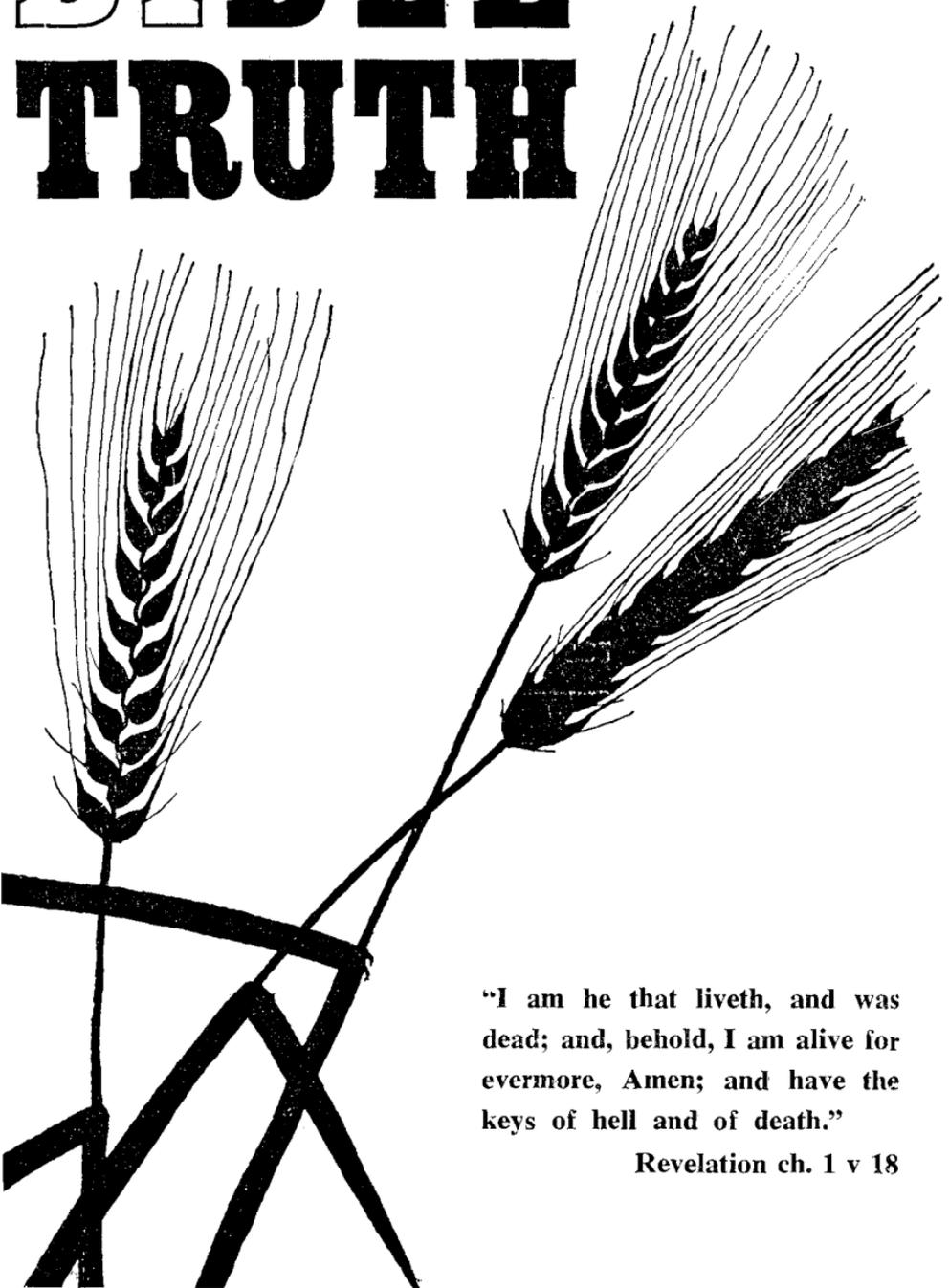


BIBLE TRUTH



"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

Revelation ch. 1 v 18

TREES IN THE PLAN OF GOD

Part 2 - Future Prospects

by Dr. Michael D. Bennett

In the first part of this article (Bible Truth No. 81) it was noted that human life started in an arboretum — a tree garden. Before the fall man's diet was predominantly fruit from trees which was freely available without hard work. After the fall this changed, and man's life now depends on his working in the fields for his foods. The process of destroying forests to make more and larger fields has continued throughout history. Belatedly the importance of trees in determining world weather patterns, in preventing erosion, in providing potent molecules (including medicines) and as a renewable source of materials and foods is now recognised. Nevertheless, man is destroying trees and forests so fast, that soon few will remain. Greed, defoliants sprayed from the air, erosion, and economic pressures have all reduced the size of earth's forest and the number of species they contain in recent years. God said: "**. . . the tree of the field is man's life.**" Moreover, God said that the good life would find "every man under his vine and under his fig tree." What then does the Bible reveal about the future place of trees in the plan of God?

The great destruction of trees

The final days of the present age will be filled with the greatest troubles ever experienced

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

(Matthew ch. 24 v. 21)

These troubles will affect the balance of nature, and will certainly result in the mass destruction of trees along with

other vegetation and life forms. War, pollution, disease, pests, drought, greed and ignorance will all combine to destroy the earth's trees.

Here are some of the verses, which taken together, clearly indicate that many forests and orchards will suffer, die and disappear:

“The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and **the third part of trees** was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.”

(Revelation ch. 8 v. 7)

Is this symbolic language as many would have us believe? In part it may be, but its major fulfilment is literal as Joel chapter 1 clearly shows. This chapter also shows us that the destruction of trees and grass is immediately prior to the “day of the LORD.”

“The field is wasted, the land mourneth; . . . the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth . . . howl, . . . for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished. **The vine** is dried up, and **the fig tree** languisheth; **the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered:** . . . Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come. . . . The seed (grain-margin) is rotten under their clods . . . the corn is withered . . . the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned **all the trees of the field** (i.e. the wild species).”

(vv. 10—12, 15, 17—18)

God originally intended that man should live in an environment filled with productive trees. Yet, in this present age so much has already combined to produce a tree starved landscape. Soon, at the end of the age, further catastrophic destruction of plant life, including trees, will occur. God planned for trees — but man, history and Satan have schemed otherwise. Faced at His Coming with the treeless landscape

of the battlefield, and the tree starved landscape of the farmlands, what will God do?

The restoration of trees in the millenium

God will do what He ever did. He will restore trees to the damaged earth, and replenish the landscape. He will create again a perfect, self-renewing life support system on earth with its high tree content. Trees of all sorts, but especially fruit trees, will abound; and men will come to live on their products. In other words, God will reveal the current practice of destroying trees for as the foolishness it is, at the same time He will vindicate His law to Israel, as the perfect revelation of His truth that it was, is and ever shall be.

The final scenes of this present age will see an invasion of Palestine by a confederacy of nations led by the northern power of Meshech (Moscow) and Tubal (Tobolsk), i.e. Russia.

“ . . . Thus saith the LORD GOD; Behold, I am against thee . . . thou shalt come from thy place out of the **north** parts, . . . it shall be in the latter days . . . I am the LORD.”

(Ezekiel ch. 38 vs. 1, 15, 16 & 23)

It is to this northern army which Joel refers in foretelling that God will begin to deal with the environment (its crops and beasts) immediately after His Coming:

“But I will remove far off from you the northern army . . . Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, **for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine** do yield their strength.”

(Joel ch. 2 vv. 20—22)

It is not just the destruction of trees by war which will be corrected (the removal of the northern army) to restore fruitfulness. God will also restore optimum rainfall, and He will remove the plagues of insect pests. **Together** these things

result in the increased fruitfulness of the trees, and of the land, just quoted.

“Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he . . . will **cause** to come down for you the rain . . . And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine (from vines) and oil (from olive trees). And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty; and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.”

(Joel ch. 2 vv. 23—27)

That God will restore fruitful trees to the environment during the Millenium is clear from two passages. Both present the same image of perfect peace and prosperity in Israel as was noted in the days of Solomon (I Kings ch. 4 v. 25 — “every man under his vine and his fig tree, . . . ”). First, consider Zechariah chapter 3. God pinpoints the time of the prophecy by two things. He refers to Himself as “the LORD of hosts”, showing that the time is close to the battle when He Himself fights. Second, He speaks of the time when He will “bring forth” His servant “the BRANCH”, that is, the LORD Jesus Christ. These two things coincide only at the Second Coming and early in the Millenium.

“ . . . for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH. . . . In that day, saith **the LORD of hosts**, shall ye call **every man** his neighbour **under the vine and under the fig tree.**”

(Zechariah ch. 3 vv. 8 & 10)

It is the peculiar nature of some prophetic scripture that it can have more than one real meaning and fulfilment. It is, therefore, very often possible to apply both a symbolical and

a literal interpretation. Thus, verses speaking of the olive, the fig and the vine are often applicable to the nations which those trees often symbolize in Bible prophecy. Consequently, the second passage, which is quoted next, is so useful, because it contains clear proof that the trees in question are real, and not symbols of nations:

“And he (the LORD) shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into **pruninghooks**: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit **every man under his vine and under his fig tree**; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the **LORD of hosts** hath spoken it.”

(Micah ch. 4 vv. 3—4)

Here too, the time of fulfilment is millennial, and the place of fulfilment is on earth. The swords and spears are real, and so are the ploughshares and pruning hooks into which their metal will be recycled. The ploughshares are required for arable farming, but the pruning hooks are for use in the orchards of fruitful trees which will be so increased in size and productivity. Again we are shown the picture of plentiful perfection — “every man under his vine and under his fig tree.” In the mouth of two witnesses the truth of the vision concerning fruitful trees is established.

Left undisturbed, plant life would slowly return to forest over much of the earth's surface, including Great Britain. Put a fence round a plot of bare earth and at first weedy herbs will grow. In time these will give way to shrubs, and eventually the shrubs will be replaced by trees. This shows that trees are the natural climax of what botanists call ‘plant succession.’ Interestingly, there is a revelation in the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the novel plant succession which will occur in the millenium.

The prophecy starts at the time of destruction of trees and other plant life, and harps back to the unhappy plant

life so common since the fall — “thorns and briars” (Genesis ch. 3 v. 18).

“Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briars . . . Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high . . . ”

(Isaiah ch. 32 vv. 13 and 15)

God has graciously poured out of His spirit on His people at various times during history, notably on the day of Pentecost (Acts ch. 2). However, none of these outpourings fulfilled this prophecy from Isaiah chapter 32. This is common sense, because thorns and briars have not stopped shooting up yet! There is a future major outpouring of the Spirit of God on His people at the time of His Second Coming. It is to this outpouring that this verse refers.

“Until the spirit be poured upon us, from on high **and** the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a **forest.**”

(Isaiah ch. 32 v. 15)

The promise is threefold. When God’s spirit is poured out, **first:** thorns and briars will stop coming up; **second,** the land which is useless now (i.e. the wilderness) will become the fruitful field; and, **third,** the fruitful field (the best land at present) will become a forest of trees. This change is confirmed in other prophecies. The tops of mountains are at present a wilderness as far as agriculture is concerned, yet the LORD has said they will become productive for arable crops:

“There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: . . . ”

(Psalm 72 v. 16)

“I will put my spirit within you . . . I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. **And I will multiply the fruit of the tree,** and the increase of the field . . . And the desolate land shall be tilled,

whereas it lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like **the garden of Eden**; . . . Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that **I the LORD . . . plant that that was desolate**: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it.”

(Ezekiel ch. 36 vv. 27, 29—30 & 34—36)

When men say that the land is “like the garden of Eden” it will not be an exaggeration. God’s original plan for man was not a mistake. God will yet have His perfect way. Obviously then the land must return to its original state, and that was Eden.

From man’s impatient view, the trouble with trees is the time they take to become productive. Indeed, God’s law forbids taking a normal crop from a fruit tree until its fifth year:

“And ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of **trees for food**, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of. But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD withal. And in the fifth year shall ye eat thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof: I am the Lord your God.”

(Leviticus ch. 19 vv. 23—25)

God’s direct involvement in restoring trees

The Millenium will be a demonstration — a working example for a thousand years — of the wisdom of God’s law. Thus, this law regarding the picking of fruit from new vineyards and orchards will certainly be obeyed. God knows that in the long run the productivity of the trees is increased by conserving their strength during their early years. The early years after the Second Coming will be spent in hard work including planting trees. It will be some years before the fruits of this labour will be seen.

However, the LORD Himself will also be active, because:

there will be a terrible need for fruitfulness immediately after the Second Coming. The LORD is not tied to natural processes. He did not need a large productive vineyard to provide plenty of the best wine at the wedding at Cana. He did it with nothing more than pots of water and His Word. Neither did He need extensive barley fields to provide the loaves needed to feed the five thousand (John ch. 2 vv. 1—12 and ch. 6 vv. 1—14). Adam and Eve did not have to wait for trees to grow in Eden, and neither did they have to plant them. God planted the trees in Eden, and He did it by the Word of His power. They were created as mature fruitful organisms. He will do the same again at His Coming and His people will have food:

“ . . . you shall know that **I the LORD** . . . plant that that was desolate.”

(Ezekiel ch. 36 v. 36)

“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void . . . it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and **all the trees of the field shall clap their hands**. Instead of the thorn (of the curse — see Genesis ch. 3 v. 18) shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

(Isaiah ch. 55 vv. 11—13)

The Lord multiplied the barley loaves in His hands at the feeding of the five thousand. Now He says that He will multiply the fruit of the tree . . .

“And **I will multiply the fruit of the tree**, and the increase of the field . . .”

(Ezekiel ch. 36 v. 30)

By how many times will the Lord multiply the fruit of the tree? We must wait and see to know the answer for each tree. However, the LORD has revealed the answer for one most important tree. It will be by twelve times. It is easy to

read the words, but it is hard to really comprehend the coming reality. Twelve different types of fruit from the same tree and a crop of fruit from the same tree every month! Productivity will increase, i.e. by 1,200 per cent!

“In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month:”

(Revelation ch. 22 v. 2)

Such variety and abundance will go a long way towards supplying the need.

There was a working demonstration of all this in the days of Hezekiah. Then too there was an invasion of God's land from the north. Then too God judged the invading forces with total destruction. God's people should have had a very lean time because of the ravages of the war in their land. But God met their need in a wonderful way by increasing the natural fruitfulness of their land for two years. Thus He gave an example of what He will do on a large scale at the start of the Millenium: at the same time the account interweaves the truth concerning the real trees with that symbolising God's people in a remarkable way:

“By thy messengers thou (the king of Assyria) hast reproached the Lord, and hast said . . . I . . . will cut down the tall cedar trees . . . and the choice fir trees . . . Therefore their inhabitants were of small power . . . they were as the grass . . . and as corn blasted before it be grown up. . . . And this shall be a sign unto thee (God's people), Ye shall eat this year such things as grow of themselves, and the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruits thereof.

(II Kings ch. 19 vv. 23, 26 & 29)

The restoration of health

God will restore things as they were in the beginning. The tree of life grew by the rivers of Eden in Genesis. Consequently the tree of life will grow by the rivers which

flow from Jerusalem in Revelation. In restoring man's access to this wonderful tree, God will restore not only its amazing fruit, but also its glorious leaves.

“For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.”

(Jeremiah ch. 30 v. 17)

In restoring the tree of life to His people God will make their city the centre of a world health scheme based on the healing power of its leaves. The heathen nations roundabout will look up to God's people for this reason if for no other:

“In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river was there the tree of life, . . . **and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.**”

(Revelation ch. 22 v. 2)

Ezekiel had the same vision about six centuries before the Apostle John. In the Millenium God's land will be like Eden with an abundance of trees, especially fruit trees:

“Now when I had returned, behold, at the bank of the river were **very many trees** on the one side and on the other . . . And by the river upon the bank thereof . . . shall grow **all trees for meat** (food), whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and **the fruit thereof shall be for meat** (food), and the leaf thereof for medicine (margin, cuts and bruises). Thus saith the LORD GOD; . . . ”

(Ezekiel ch. 47 vv. 7, 12—13)

Replanting the tribal allotments

In restoring all things, the LORD will restore the tribal inheritances to the twelve tribes of Israel. It is a curious thought, even to British Israelites, to know that each has a rightful claim to a part of the ancient inheritance in the land of promise. One of the glorious surprises after the return of

the Lord will be to discover in which tribal allotment our inheritance is found, and then to visit it, or even to return and live in it!

“Thus, saith the LORD GOD; This shall be the border, whereby ye shall inherit the land according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions . . . ”

(Ezekiel ch. 47 v. 13)

Then God’s word concerning the planting of trees in the Millenium will be fulfilled:

“Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat them **as common things** . . . a great company shall return thither . . . Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him . . . For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.”

(Jeremiah ch. 31 vv. 5, 8, 10—11)

Fruit trees in the new earth

We have seen that God’s people will return to a tree based agricultural system in the Millenium, as it was in the beginning in Eden. Little is revealed to us concerning the world that is to come after this one is destroyed. However, one of the few things which the LORD chose to show us is that man’s life will still include fruit trees, even in the new earth. Long, long ago God said that, “**the tree of the field is man’s life.**” This truth will never be lost:

“For, behold, I create new heavens and **a new earth:** and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. . . . And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and **they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.** They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for **as the days of a tree are the days of my people,** and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.”

(Isaiah ch. 65 vv. 17, 21—22)

This article authored by Dr Michael D. Bennett was originally published in the magazine Bible Truth in 1989.

The correct way to cite this article is either:
Bennett MD., 1989. Trees in the plan of God -
Part 2: Future Prospects.
Bible Truth, 82 (October) pp. 4-14 (1982)

or:

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trees_in_the_plan_of_god_part_two_article.pdf](http://www.actscambridge.org/assets/images/trees_in_the_plan_of_god_part_two_article.pdf)

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