

Like A Tree

by Mike Ford (1955-2021)

Forerunner, "Ready Answer,"

“ He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” (Psalm 1:3)

The Eighth Day, often called the Last Great Day, immediately following the Feast of Tabernacles, represents the Great White Throne Judgment period, which will last, we believe, a hundred years. Just as this day follows the Feast of Tabernacles, the hundred years follow the Millennium, continuing all the benefits of that time. Isaiah 65:20-22, a beautiful section of Scripture, speaks of this period:

No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build homes and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

“As the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people.” The phrase “the days of a tree” suggests eternity. Once the second resurrection has occurred and the hundred-year period is over, we will have eternity to look forward to—not just the firstfruits, but also all who have ever lived, other than the few (we hope) who will end their days in the Lake of Fire.

According to commentator Adam Clarke, Jewish tradition teaches that it refers to the Tree of Life. Revelation 22:1-2 mentions the Tree of Life in New Jerusalem in the context of the New Heaven and New Earth after the hundred years:

And He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

At this time, God has established His throne in New Jerusalem. The river of the water of life runs along its course from God's throne, and along its banks and down the center of the city's streets stand trees called "the tree of life." Each tree produces fruit every month, and its leaves never fade. These trees live forever. Won't they be a grand sight!

Trees in Scripture

Near the end of his life, Herbert Armstrong frequently spoke about the two trees in the Garden of Eden, each symbolizing a competing way of life (see Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-24). He preached that the Tree of Life represents God's way, the way of "give," and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil symbolizes Satan and his way of "get." He hammered this insight home to us relentlessly. He wanted us to make the right choice, unlike Adam and Eve, who ate the fruit of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge. He desired that we partake of the Tree of Life, which will line the streets of New Jerusalem.

It sounds like we need to know a little about trees if we desire to partake of the Tree of Life. What can we learn from them?

In the Bible, trees often serve as metaphors and similes for Christians. It mentions 26 different trees, from the almond to the willow, each created for a specific use. That number, however, is only a tiny portion of the world's 23,000 different kinds of trees.

Trees enhance our lives in a multitude of ways. The average American uses 750 pounds of paper a year, and 95% of us live in homes built using wood. Each of us, then, uses the equivalent of a one-hundred-foot tall, 16-inch-diameter tree every year for our paper and wood needs. Whether for their beauty, fruit, wood for fuel, wood for building, or wood pulp for the paper that our Bibles are printed on, trees are a big part of our lives.

God seems to be big on trees too. His Son spent much of His human life as a carpenter. When He compares us to trees, however, it goes much deeper than their physical usefulness. Notice Psalm 1:1-3:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates
day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,
that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not
wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

We can take five insights from this short passage:

1. This tree, representing an individual among God's people, is *planted*. It does not spring from a seed dropped by a bird or blown by the wind. Its planting implies purpose. Who would do that? God, of course. John 6:44 teaches that we do not come to God of our own accord; in fact, "*no one* can come to [Christ] unless the Father . . . draws him" (emphasis ours). He calls each person and directs his or her life, planting each where He desires.
2. He plants each tree by rivers of water, which nourishes and sustains it. Water, of course, is a common symbol of God's Holy Spirit throughout Scripture. So, if God in His wisdom plants us in the right spot and gives us plenty of water, we can guess what will likely happen next.
3. Unlike the fig tree in Jesus' parable that failed to produce fruit and is cut down and thrown in the fire (see Luke 13:6-9; John 15:6), this divinely planted and nourished tree bears fruit in its season. It produces the good works God planted it to produce (see John 15:8; Ephesians 2:10).
4. Like the Tree of Life in Revelation 22:2, the leaves on this tree do not wither. The process God puts His "trees" through produces, not withering and death, which is the "natural" course of things, but growth, productivity, and life.
5. The psalmist proclaims that this person who is like a tree will prosper in whatever he does. The gist of the psalm does not imply material

prosperity—land, houses, cars, jewelry, cash—but spiritual, long-term success. Ultimately, he means righteousness, rulership, and eternal life in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 19:7-8; 20:6)!

The Attributes of a Tree

Notice that the psalmist writes that the blessed person “shall be like a tree.” Why is that? Is it possible that, if we adopt specific attributes of a tree, we, like the blessed man, can avoid sin, delight in the law, and prosper eternally? We need to pursue this line of thought.

Trees get 90% of their nutrition from the atmosphere and only 10% from the soil. Humans receive physical nutrition from the soil, through the food it produces, but we get our spiritual nourishment from God through His Holy Spirit—through the “air” or on the “wind,” as it were. If we wish to think of the Holy Spirit like water, we can imagine the tree receiving nutrition when falling rain thoroughly soaks its leaves.

Another astounding fact about trees is that they grow from the top, not the bottom. A branch’s location on a trunk will only move up the trunk a few inches in a millennium. Have you ever hung a birdhouse on a tree branch in the backyard? It has not risen higher in all the years it has been hanging there, has it?

Consider the growth of a Christian. While our physical growth may occur in various parts of our body—especially in the middle!—as we age, our spiritual growth happens at the top. God opens our minds by His Spirit, and He pours in knowledge. We take it in by study, prayer, and meditation, and our minds expand. Christian growth is from the top.

We can think of this in another way: Jesus is the vine or the trunk, and we are the branches that grow off it (John 15:1, 5). He puts us where He wants us on the tree, and we should be content there to do what He wants us to do. As the Head of the church, He feeds us to prepare us to produce the fruit He desires (see John 6:45; Ephesians 4:7-24).

Most people do not realize that trees can induce rainfall by cooling the land and transpiring water into the sky through their leaves. A large tree, through

transpiration, can lift a hundred gallons of water a day and discharge it into the air through evaporation. An acre of maple trees can put as much as 20,000 gallons of water into the atmosphere each day! When God's children help Jesus Christ make the deserts bloom in the Millennium (Isaiah 35:1-2, 6-7), they will surely be planting a great many trees.

In this arboreal image, we can understand that the Holy Spirit flows both into and out of us. As we use the Holy Spirit in proper words and good works, God gives us more. When we pray, encourage others, share the truth, do acts of kindness, and the like, we are "transpiring" like a tree!

Trees keep us alive in other ways. A tree can absorb as much as 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year, sequestering one ton of carbon dioxide by the time it reaches forty years old. A single tree can absorb enough carbon in a year as a car produces driving 26,000 miles. They not only inhale the bad stuff, but they also exhale the good stuff, oxygen, for our use. One large tree can supply enough oxygen for a family of four.

We, as Christians, spend our converted lives absorbing hit after hit, trial after trial, and if we do it right, we grow and overcome. Like a tree, we sequester or store away the lessons of life's difficulties. We cannot afford to let them pull us down or stop us. While taking in these vital life-lessons, we respond by demonstrating an excellent example for those around us to see, remember, and we hope, follow.

Most people do not know that trees trap more of the sun's energy than any other group of organisms on earth. They are, in a way, like giant batteries, the largest on the planet. While organisms trap only 0.1% of the sun's energy, trees account for half of that figure. Without sunlight, there would be no photosynthesis, and without photosynthesis, no oxygen and no human life. Consider how much trees do with only this minuscule portion of the sun's energy!

How much of His Holy Spirit does God shine on us? No one knows, but it would make sense that Christians, among all earth's people, absorb the vast majority, if not all, of what is absorbed. Yet, we probably fail to absorb all but a tiny fraction of what God sends—perhaps not even to the level of a tree's 0.1% absorption of sunlight!

But just as trees accomplish so much with so little, so it can be with us. If we had the faith of a mustard seed, we could command a tree to be pulled up by its roots and thrown in the sea, and it would happen (Luke 17:6)! How far have we come in our spiritual lives on a small amount of the Holy Spirit? What will we be able to do when God deems us worthy to receive more?

Sages maintain that no tree dies of old age. Insects, diseases, droughts, or people generally kill them long before then. California is home to sequoias and bristlecone pines that are four and five thousand years old, still alive and well! Other places around the globe showcase ancient trees for tourists to “ooh” and “ah” over.

From a purely physical standpoint, humans can and do die of old age, but like trees, something else kills us first more often than not. What do we humans do to kill ourselves? We fail to eat right, exercise, or get enough sleep, and we wonder why we get sick and die. We smoke, drink, take drugs, fornicate, drive too fast, and shoot each other. We contract innumerable diseases that take our lives.

Spiritually, though, we have the potential to live forever. The Tree of Life, lining the banks of the river coming from God’s throne and running down the center of New Jerusalem’s streets, will produce fruit abundantly for all eternity. We whom the Lord has planted will have the opportunity to partake of it.

Alpha and Omega

To know where we are going, it helps to know where we have been. In a spiritual sense, God makes it easy because He has provided us a road map, and He works in patterns. He also brings things full circle in His Word to help us see the process from beginning to end.

In Revelation 22:13, Christ tells the apostle John that He is “the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.” In Scripture, He shows us a complete cycle, from Genesis 1 to its end in Revelation 22. It is the cycle of the Tree of Life in the Garden to the Tree of Life in New Jerusalem.

Genesis begins with the creation of the heavens and the earth, and Revelation ends with a New Heaven and a New Earth. In Genesis, man meets Satan and is overcome, while in Revelation, Satan meets Christ and is cast down and ultimately put down. In Genesis, Adam and Eve pick the forbidden fruit from a tree and incur the death penalty and all its curses, but in Revelation, the Tree of Life heals the nations. Genesis relates the beginning of sorrows, while Revelation foretells the end of sorrows.

In Revelation 22:16, Christ proclaims some of His titles, and the very first one is “I am the Root”! From that Root grows many trees—His firstfruits—planted by rivers of water. Like Psalm 1, which associates these blessed individuals with obedience to God’s law, Revelation 22:14 says, “Blessed are those who do His commandments,” a trait, one could say, of a godly tree. And why is that important? “. . . that they may have the right to the tree of life . . .”!

The Tree of Life, while very real, is also a metaphor for a way of life, one that requires overcoming and obedience. As we have seen, it requires taking on the positive attributes of a tree. Adam and Eve lost their chance to eat of the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22-24), but by God’s grace, we have that chance!

And not only us. We must remember that the Last Great Day pictures the inclusion of all who have ever lived after they have learned the truth and lived it. God will welcome into His Kingdom whole orchards and forests full of godly trees that have grown to maturity in the way of the Lord.