

# Spiritual Lessons from a Tree

God, in His wisdom, wove into nature eternal truths that are unaffected by time. When Christ interacted with the well-studied and learned men of His day, He pointed them to a book that they had not read, the book of nature. There are many lessons we can learn that will enhance our understanding of the Bible if we study the two books together.

“Since the book of nature and the book of revelation bear the impress of the same Master mind, they cannot but speak in harmony. By different methods, and in different languages, they witness to the same great truths. Science is ever discovering new wonders; but she brings from her research nothing that, rightly understood, conflicts with divine revelation. The book of nature and the written Word shed light upon each other. They make us acquainted with God by teaching us something of the laws through which He works.”—*Education*, 128.

Through examples in nature, Christ illustrated great truths that would be very difficult to explain or even understand. One of the greatest mysteries in the Bible is the conversion of sinners. Christ used the mysterious force of the wind to illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion.

“The wind is heard among the branches of the trees, rustling the leaves and flowers; yet it is invisible, and no man knows whence it comes or whither it goes. So with the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. It can no more be explained than can the movements of the wind. A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or to trace all the circumstances in the process of conversion; but this does not prove him to be unconverted. By an agency as unseen as the wind, Christ is constantly working upon the heart. Little by little, perhaps unconsciously to the receiver, impressions are made that tend to draw the soul to Christ. These may be received through meditating upon Him, through reading the Scriptures, or through hearing the Word from the living preacher. Suddenly, as the Spirit comes with more direct appeal, the soul gladly surrenders itself to Jesus. By many this is called sudden conversion; but it is the result of long wooing by the Spirit of God, a patient, protracted process.”—*Desire of Ages*, 172.

If we study nature with spiritual insight instead of the heart of a fool, we will be richly rewarded. Now, let's go on a treasure hunt through nature.

## Establishing a Foundation

As with all things, spiritual perception must be taught by an instructor until it is grown enough to discern the great things of God without a textbook. The Bible is full of instruction on how to read the book of nature. The righteous are like a harvest of grain. The Bible declares that Christ comes to reap His people: “For the harvest of the earth is ripe” (Revelation 14:15). The wicked are like thorns:

“But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.”—Hebrews 6:8.

The righteous are also like sheep:

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”—John 10:27.

The wicked are further described as wolves:

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening [greedy, predatory behavior] wolves.”—Matthew 7:15.

The Bible describes Christ as a lion:

“Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.”—Revelation 5:5.

But He is also “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

Satan is also described as a lion:

“Be sober, be vigilant (keenly alert to trouble or danger); because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”—1 Peter 5:8.

Satan is further described as a dragon (a huge serpent, a mythical monster usually represented as breathing fire and having a scaly, reptile-like body, wings, claws, and a long tail).

“The great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.”—Revelation 12:9.

So how do we understand this? How can it be that the same symbolism is used to describe Christ and Satan, who are as different as light and darkness? This is why we need spiritual discernment.

Let us see what characteristics a lion possesses.  
2 Apart from personal observation, the Bible points us to specific traits of a lion:

“And he also that is valiant [brave, bold, courageous], whose heart is as the heart of a lion.”—2 Samuel 17:10.

The Bible describes one who has a valiant heart as being like a lion. Proverbs 28:1 enlarges upon this idea:

“The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.”

Another comparison is between the wrath of a king and the roar of a lion:

“The king’s wrath is as the roaring of a lion.”—Proverbs 19:12.

And lastly we read:

“A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any.”—Proverbs 30:30.

Christ is like a lion because He demonstrated strength of character greater than any man; He was not turned aside from His purpose. Possessing a valiant heart, He manifested the boldness of a lion. Isaiah records the words of Christ:

“I gave my back to the smiters [those who hit, afflicted, and punished Him] and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help Me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set My face like a flint [a type of very hard gray stone, known for its ability to produce sparks when struck against steel], and I know that I shall not be ashamed.” —Isaiah 50:6-7.

Christ purposed to fulfill His mission. In the same way people get out of the way of a sauntering (walking about in an idle or leisurely manner) lion, demons were forced to step aside when they crossed paths with Christ. In a word, Jesus was undaunted (courageously firm and bold [especially in the face of danger or difficulty] and not discouraged).

Some of these traits also describe Satan. He is also set in his course, and will not turn aside for any, except one he recognizes as stronger. But there are other descriptions that apply to him:

“Thou huntest me as a fierce lion.”—Job 10:16.

Job had mistaken the work of Satan as the work of God. Satan is a hunter who is secretly waiting to pounce and overpower unsuspecting prey.

“He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den.”—Psalm 10:9.

Once his prey is in his power, Satan does not like to let them go.

“Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.”—Psalm 17:12.

Satan is described as a roaring lion. He watches us; and, as we unite together to keep safe from him, he makes a mighty effort to destroy us through fear. Fear is one of the most effective tools to divide and conquer. It is used to draw out the selfish desire for self-preservation. This is why Christ and Satan are polar opposites. Satan is as a predator, but Christ is as a Lamb. (Predator: a person, group, or animal that robs, victimizes, or exploits others for gain) Satan uses fear and God uses Love.

Biblical imagery is used to describe specific traits. All of nature contains good traits, and because of sin, it also contains bad traits. The imagery used is not always to be accepted in its entirety; this is an important lesson to be understood about the book of nature. The Bible is a faithful guide that we can use to understand what to look for in nature.

### **Spiritual Lessons from a Tree**

Now let us turn our eyes to a verse describing the work of Christ:

“To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified.”—Isaiah 61:3.

The tree is a beautiful illustration of mankind. The Bible mentions many different kinds of trees—the noble cedars of Lebanon, the lofty oaks of Bashan (in 2025, the modern-day countries of Syria and Jordan, currently controlled by Israel), the honorable olive tree, the sweet sycamore fig tree, and the sturdy acacia tree. Each of these trees has its uses, and each has symbolism. We will not explore these trees in detail; rather, we will focus on the imagery used to depict a man.

God spoke to king Nebuchadnezzar through a dream recorded in Daniel 4, likening him to a tree with a great height (verse 10). It was decreed that this tree was to be cut down and a band of iron and brass placed around it for seven years (verses 15-16). The interpretation of this dream was that Nebuchadnezzar would lose his sanity for seven years. This dream has a great deal of description in it that can be used to better understand the spiritual lessons of a tree.

The trunk of the tree symbolizes the understanding and knowledge of a man. Nebuchadnezzar was great because of his knowledge and understanding, and these were taken from him.

This was shown by the cutting down of the tree. The band of iron and brass did not permit the tree to grow again until seven years had passed, giving further evidence of this observation. The branches symbolized his sphere of influence, the branching out of his work that affected all the beasts and fowls by providing protection (shade) and necessities required to flourish (fruit). When he lost his sanity, he lost these as well. Notice what happened when his reason returned:

“At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me.”—Daniel 4:36.

His counselors and lords sought shelter under him again. God also added more excellence and majesty to him. The beasts and birds depict the different classes of people that sought him as king. Those who were subject to him were symbolized as beasts of the field. They labored under him and were not free to do as they pleased. Those who were allied to him are depicted as birds of the air (other nations as his allies), indicating freedom to move as they please. But why was Nebuchadnezzar depicted as a tree while his subjects and allies were depicted as animals? Because Nebuchadnezzar will be in heaven. He was converted, the heart of a beast was taken from him, and he was given the heart of a man. He became a tree of righteousness, the planting of the Lord.

Let us try to understand more about trees. What does the Bible say leaves symbolize?

“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.”—Isaiah 55:12.

Have you ever heard the trees of the field clap their hands? Of course you have! When the wind blows, the trees clap their hands; it is the sound of their leaves. Clapping is a form of praise; hence, when the wind moves upon the trees, they praise God. (Jesus, when speaking to Nicodemus in John 3:8, uses the wind as a symbol to represent the Holy Spirit.) The greater our understanding, the more wind we are able to receive, just as taller trees receive more wind. In every branching work we do, we have the capacity to praise God for what we see Him do. God expects us to branch out in our lives and try new things for Him. The noblest of trees, the cedars, are straight, tall, and have many branches in all directions, demonstrating their balance in

character and life. They branch out into many fields of work and study to the preservation of those around them. Most evergreens can be considered noble trees; when life gets cold, they do not lose their leaves. This illustrates that, even in times of trial, they still praise God while others lose their leaves and spiritually die.

Jude uses trees to illustrate evil people. He mentions the “trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 12. Remember that there is only one chapter in Jude). We have all died once in our transgressions. When we are born again, we receive a second life. Jude says of these wicked that they have died twice; this shows that they are Christians who have known the way of salvation but turned from it. Their good works have withered, and they have been plucked up by the roots. Christ uses roots to symbolize our relationship with Him. Jesus says:

“I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.”—Revelation 22:16.

And Paul, speaking of our connection to Christ, says:

“If the root be holy, so are the branches.” — Romans 11:16.

If we are connected to Jesus, we will be partakers of His holiness. While these verses indicate that Christ is the actual root, other Bible texts (such as Luke 8:4-15) tell us how each human’s heart (mind, in verse 15) is the soil we grow in. And other verses still indicate that Christ is the soil that we are to root ourselves in:

“[We are to be] rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”—Colossians 2:7.

And again in Ephesians 3:17:

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love.”

Our relationship with God is like the roots of a tree. If we want to grow in knowledge and not fall because of pride, we have to be rooted and grounded in Christ and in love (1 Corinthians 8:1-3). If we are to grow in our knowledge, to grow toward the Sun of righteousness, we must keep our trust in Him. There are many trees that are crooked because of sin or that lean to their own understanding.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”—Proverbs 3:5.

When the storms of life come, each one’s relationship with Christ will keep him from falling.

4 The wicked whom Jude speaks of have fallen, and they are no longer rooted in Christ but in the air of vanity. God sent them strong delusions to test their roots, and they had a shallow relationship with Him. In their time of trial and hardship, they uprooted themselves from Christ. These are twice dead, plucked up by the roots, with no hope of being grounded again. And who are they according to Jude?

“These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts.”—Jude 1:16.

They wanted an excuse to grow in vanity and Satan, the king of excuses, provided what they wanted.

### A Brief Refresher

We are trees of righteousness; the trunk symbolizes our understanding and knowledge. We grow crooked if we receive the experiential knowledge of sin or lean to our own understanding. The leaves represent our praises to God; hopefully, these do not die when we come in contact with the coldness of the world or we lose them in the storms of life.

The fruits are our good works. The sweetest of our good works are those that take the most self-sacrifice to perform.

The branches are our sphere of influence that needs to be constantly expanding. Our sphere of influences should not include striving or rubbing against other branches; this is very bad for the health of the tree and a danger during storms.

Our roots are our relationship with God. These roots are to stay under the ground, hidden from the sight of others. We do not want to be like the hypocrites who made long prayers in public and proclaimed their own “righteousness” to others.

### More Lessons

Most fruit trees require pruning in order to keep them healthy. God sometimes calls us to remove our influence from certain places, to keep us healthy. In these times, we can be confused and in pain; but we should always remember that God knows what He is doing. We are in the hands of the Master gardener. Ellen White had a vision about how she was symbolized as a vine and the members of the church as trees. She had looked to them for support, but they had shaken her off them. In her vision, she was lifted up by God and supported by Him. She is aptly described as a vine because, through her, God feeds us doctrine, instruction,

and encouragement (grapes/grape juice). See *Life Sketches*, 175-177.

Very few trees have anything other than bark to protect them. We likewise should offer no resistance when others hurt us. We want to develop thick skin through disinterested love: a love that “suffereth long” and yet remains “kind.” See 1 Corinthians 13:4.

Maple syrup comes from the “blood” of a maple tree that has been pierced. This sap is then heated and condensed, making syrup. The leaves, during fall, range in color from gold to orange and even red. Jesus can be seen in this tree. He was pierced for us so that we could taste the sweetness of His life (His blood). His praises were golden, with faith, and red with sacrifice. We also want to be sweet like He was when our hearts are pierced with sorrows and we are heated in fires of trial.

The acacia tree, also known as “shittim” in the King James Version, is a thorny tree that requires a lot of hewing (to cut something by repeated blows, as of an axe) and polishing to use. It was the only type of wood used in the construction of the tabernacle and its furniture as instructed by God in the book of Exodus, chapters 25-27 and 36-38. The tree is gnarled, and looks very unusable; likewise, we, through sin have been twisted and hardened until we become unusable. But in the hands of the Master carpenter, Christ fashions us into His children. He tells us, “Without Me, ye can do nothing” (John 15:5). If it were not for Jesus, who humbled Himself to work with such unusable wood, we would be consumed by fire, the fate of all things with thorns. Christ has rescued us from the lake of fire and even incorporated (united in one body) us into the plan of salvation. Let us present our bodies to be fashioned into the most beautiful structure that was ever made.

*For a finished work,*



**Jonathan Taylor**

*Wisdom is justified of all her children. -Luke 7:35*

*More Food for the Little Flock —*