

DAY 1: THE GARDENER

Read Isaiah 5:1-7; Ezekiel 15: 1-6; Psalm 80:8-9; John 15:1.

In the Slovenian town of Maribor, there is a vine reputed to be more than four hundred years old which means it is even older than the one at Hampton Court. Incredibly, both vines still bear quality fruit into their very old age.

Remarkable as each of these structures is, each one began with the planting of a seed or a cutting which could only grow and develop into its full potential through the ministrations of the successive gardeners over many generations whose job has been to lovingly tend, nurture, prune and do their utmost to provide the optimum conditions to ensure that the vines and their branches continue to be healthy and bear as much fruit as possible.

The tenderness of the gardener's care is a beautiful analogy of the enduring Father-heart of God, who is described as such in John's gospel. In fact, there is a 'seed' – a longing planted in His heart – for the restoration of the intimate relationship He intended for Adam and Eve but which was lost through The Fall. As believers, we realise our own in-built need for a relationship with God, but do we ever stop to consider how much He longs for a personal relationship with us even more!

Eventually God chose the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in whom He planted the 'seed' of the Kingdom, with the sole objective of having a faithful relationship with the nation of Israel, whom the Bible describes as a Vine.

Naturally, the wood of the vine is of no practical use at all. It cannot be used for carpentry, tools or structures due to its brittleness and lack of durability. This is a sad indictment on disobedient Israel. Ezekiel writes:

“Is wood ever taken from it to make anything useful? Do they make pegs from it to hang things on? And after it is thrown on the fire as fuel and the fire burns both ends and chars the middle, is it then useful for anything? If it was not useful for anything when it was whole, how much less can it be made into something useful when the fire has burned it and it is charred?”

What a scathing judgement on God's precious dearly-loved Vine. Yet He did not, and has not, given up on them: He sent Jesus! Through Him, the relationship with God was opened out beyond Israel to include whomsoever believes in Him – Jew or Gentile.

Additional reading: Isaiah 27; Zechariah 8; Galatians 4:4-5.

PRAYER TIME:

Think over what you have learned today concerning the enduring love and faithful heart of Father God towards His Vine.

- What does this picture of the gardener say to you?
- What hope is there in Isaiah 27 and Zechariah 8 for Israel?
- What does this hope teach us about our own relationship with God?

Spend the remainder of your time today in thanksgiving, praise and worship. Consider God's enduring loving kindness and faithfulness towards Israel and the difference and possibilities Jesus brought for all of us to have a relationship with God.

Meditate on the wonder of His Father-heart for you. Thank Him for also including you in His long-term plans.

DAY 2: THE ROOT

Read Exodus 19: 3-8; Exodus 20: 1-17.

Roots are critically important to the survival and prosperity of any vegetation, but especially so to a plant like a vine whose sole purpose is to not be merely decorative, but to bear fruit. If the roots are weak or fail to develop, then the plant will fail to prosper, die and there will be no fruit.

A strong root anchors the plant to the ground. This provides stability and support for the whole structure, and through the root system the vine absorbs water, carbohydrates, and nutrients from the soil – all of which are vital for a healthy life, growth, and the ability to bear good strong fruit.

The ‘root’ of the Vine, which provided the stability and moral compass of our society, not just for Israel, but for much of wider society around the world over generations, had been the terms of God’s covenant: The Ten Commandments. But that is no longer the case.

Since the end of World War II, leaders of successive generations have manipulated and legislated away from our Judeo-Christian heritage. So, with the removal of these spiritual and moral foundations, many of us – believers as well as unbelievers – place our faith for stability in society and personal security in such things as our bank accounts, the NHS, the police, military, judicial and education systems; the electricity or gas company; the shops for our food supply; or in the company we work for – that they will have sufficient funds to pay our wages each month. But as we contemplate living through the end-times, with its increasing societal instability and the very real possibility of persecution for both the Jews and Gentile believers, we must come to the realisation that all these things will at some point either fail, fall short of our expectations or be removed from us. What then will be the ‘root’ that provides our personal security, stability, and structure for society?

It must be our personal relationship with our loving, long-suffering, covenant-initiating and covenant-keeping Father God. He is the only one who will never let us down – He cannot – because His very nature means that He is not only loving but also faithful, steadfast, loyal, good, and totally dependable.

In very simple terms the Covenant, which is a binding agreement, reassures us that God, who is incapable of reneging on it, is thoroughly on our side; that whatever we are facing, He will be with us in and through it; everything He is, is also ours; our battles are His too; He will defend, protect, and fight for us. In short, we are doing life together with the One who is the solid immovable Rock of Israel!

Additional reading: Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 18:1-3; 2 Chronicles 20:15-17.

PRAYER TIME:

Think over what you have read today about how far our society has drifted from the 'root' of our Judeo-Christian heritage.

- Write down any thoughts or concerns you have about where you see our nation is heading.
- What do you consider to be our hope?

Spend some time talking to God about the things you have written. Be sure to hand-over to Him any fears you might have and make the choice to trust Him with your future, whatever that may be.

Give any remaining time today to meditating on the enduring, faithful, loving covenant-heart of Father God. Consciously invite and allow His peace and love to abide or rest in you today.