

Why Trees Are Significant in Bible Prophecy, Modern Israel

Trees are much more than ecological pillars. They are rich in biblical significance. Living in Israel, we see this, and are blessed by it, every day.

Ezekiel prophesied when the Jewish people returned to the land:

I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing. And I will cause the showers to come down in their season. They shall be showers of blessing. The tree of the field shall yield its fruit, and the ground shall yield its increase, and they shall be safe in their land. Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have broken the bands of their yoke and delivered them out of the hand of those who enslaved them (Ezek. 34:26-27).

I see that in my own yard, with plum, lemon, apple, cherry, apricot and lime trees, and a beautiful grape vine.

Even before Ezekiel prophesied, the significance of trees is made clear by God in Leviticus 19:23. The Jewish people consider it a biblical obligation not just to plant the land, but how and when to harvest. Trees are central in our lives. In my town, the neighborhoods are named for indigenous fruits of the land, including olives, dates and pomegranates. When we planted our own yard, we did so for more than landscaping, but to connect us to the land and our history here. We observe the sabbatical year in letting the trees lie fallow. There's much more.

The Bible underscores the significance of fruit trees in particular, even at times of war. "When you lay siege to a city for a long time, in making war against it in order to

take it, you shall not destroy the trees there by chopping them down with an axe, for you may eat from them, and you shall not cut them down. For the tree of the field is not a man in which to lay siege" (Deut. 20:19). Trees are precious and must not be taken for granted.

Last year, I launched Run for Zion to provide a unique and meaningful way to connect Christians to Israel and Jews and Christians together. Israel is no less significant to Christians than Jews. Understanding Judaism is central to understanding Jesus as a Jew in Israel 2000 years ago, and the foundation of Christianity.

Run for Zion specifically is designed to facilitate Christians to run in Jerusalem in organized races. But we do so by also enabling people to connect with and bless the people and the Land.

When people come Run for Zion, we say they bless Israel with every step. One of the hands-on, tangible ways participants do that is by planting trees, getting dirt under their fingernails. This is literally part of Ezekiel's prophecy. Not just any trees but fruit trees. But for those who can't join Run for Zion in the Land in person, you can plant a fruit tree in the land virtually, from anywhere.

Trees play a huge role in Jewish tradition. God protected Jonah under a tree or vine in a profound teaching moment. Hagar left Ishmael under a tree or bush in the desert so she wouldn't see him die. And Jesus cursed the fig tree.

Since its rebirth, Israel has the significance of being the only country that entered the 21st century with *more* trees than it had at the beginning of the 20th century. We are indeed living Ezekiel's prophecy.

While not biblical, even Mark Twain referenced this. Israel, he wrote, is a "desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds—a silent mournful expanse. ...

A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action. ... There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere."

That was then. Today, thanks to the planting of millions of trees, Twain would be shocked. And Ezekiel would be beaming in joy.

On the biblical calendar, the 15th of the Hebrew month Shvat, Tu B'Shvat, is known as the new year of the trees. Schools close and children take trips to plant the land. It's not just an outing, it's a chance to literally connect with the biblical roots of the land and to plant new roots. Other than planting trees, the day is marked by celebrations involving eating—you guessed it—fruit from trees.

This year, Tu B'Shvat fell on Monday, Jan. 21. Run for Zion is planting fruit trees in the land of Israel, allowing people to be part of biblical prophecy.

There's a story of a child who sees an old man planting a tree. The child sees this and understands that the old man will not live long enough to benefit from the tree's fruit, much less its shade. The child asks why the old man is planting the tree, to which the old man responds, "My father planted for me and so I plant for my children."

I believe that those who plant fruit trees in Israel are not only expressing their love in a way that brings forth fruit as Ezekiel prophesied, but in a way that will do so every year. These trees will provide shade, fruit, good ecology and be a blessing for generations to come.

"I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field so that you shall receive no more reproach of famine among the nations" (Ezek. 36:30). {eoa}

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