

1. **Introduction:** When Christians think about their relationship with God, they rightfully tend to focus on the glorious wonders of salvation through grace alone by faith alone. Being spiritually born again signals the beginning of an intimate never-ending relationship with God, one that continues from “new life in the here and now” to new life in a more complete sense in the everlasting age to come.
- ◆ Scripture provides several metaphors for what it is like to experience the saving grace of God. The one that seems to provide the most complete picture of the relationship believers have with Christ is Jesus’ own extended metaphor of the “True Vine.”
  - ◆ As the time of His death came near, Jesus increasingly spent most of His time teaching His Disciples to prepare them for what lay ahead.
  - ◆ On the night of the last supper and His betrayal, Jesus taught the disciples important things including the metaphor of the “True Vine.” Jesus repeatedly told the disciples that He must leave them. That alarmed the disciples. To comfort them, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit coming to stand with them and of Himself as the true vine.
  - ◆ The “True Vine” metaphor revealed to them that although He was leaving them physically, they would have a new even closer connection to Him. He had been with them physically as they ministered. Now He would be with them in a spiritual intimacy enduring through mortal life and into eternity, an intimacy as close as that between a vine and its branches.
  - ◆ It is a powerful metaphor that applies not only to the disciples who first heard it but to all who are “in Christ.”
  - ◆ The vine metaphor has deep significance in the history of Israel, and yet Jesus unfolds it with a totally new perspective. The Jews prided themselves as being the chosen “Vine of God.” Now Jesus reveals that He, not Israel, is the “True Vine of God.”
  - ◆ The deep historical roots of the vine as a symbol for Israel’s relationship to God made Jesus’ metaphor especially meaningful to His disciples.
  - ◆ Whenever Jesus taught His followers about Himself, they naturally interpreted His remarks in terms of their understanding of the Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament).

2. **Israel as the “Vine of God”**: Based on teachings from their Scripture, Jews in Jesus’ time prided themselves as being the chosen “Vine of God.”
- ◆ The most well-known and dramatic visible presentation of this concept was found in a prominent place, one every worshipping Jew would be familiar with.
  - ◆ Over the main entrance of the Temple grounds, a place no one, who came to the Temple could avoid, there was a lovely gold-leafed vine and branches with luscious looking grapes.
  - ◆ That beautiful vine was a magnificent symbol reminding the Jews of their unique direct relationship with God Himself!
3. **The Vine in the OT**: The use of a grapevine and its fruit to symbolize God’s relationship with Israel is found in many places. Here are some examples.
4. **Psalm 80:8-15**: *“You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. <sup>9</sup> You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. <sup>10</sup> The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. <sup>11</sup> It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River. <sup>12</sup> Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? <sup>13</sup> The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. <sup>14</sup> Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, <sup>15</sup> the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself. They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face! <sup>17</sup> But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!”*
- ◆ Israel is described as a vine brought from Egypt and carefully planted in a new land. It spread widely, bore good fruit, but it was allowed to fall into ruin because the people forgot how they came to their new land. There was danger and destruction, and the messiah (the son of man) is needed to deal with the problem.
  - ◆ Often in their history the children of Israel disobey and drift from God. For Jeremiah, at a time of national crisis, when the future is threatened, Israel is a choice [or true] vine; but becomes wild, useless. **Jeremiah 2:21** *“Yet I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine?”*

- ◆ In the words of Ezekiel 19:10-14 at another time of danger, Israel was said to have a mother like a vine, its strong stems like the scepters of rulers, that is with the power of a king ... it is plucked up and replanted in a desert, suffers fire and no longer has a strong stem or scepter (or king) and they thus are in need of a new king or Messiah.
  - ◆ Likewise in Hosea 10:1-4, *“Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars.<sup>2</sup> Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will break down their altars and destroy their pillars.<sup>3</sup> For now they will say: “We have no king, for we do not fear the LORD; and a king - what could he do for us?”<sup>4</sup> They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants; so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.”*
  - ◆ In Isaiah 5, we see that God loved his vineyard, but it became wild and unproductive and is going to be allowed to be devoured. **Isaiah 5:1-7** *“Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.<sup>2</sup> He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes.<sup>3</sup> And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.<sup>4</sup> What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?<sup>5</sup> And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.<sup>6</sup> I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briers and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.<sup>7</sup> For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!”*
  - ◆ Thus, the nation Israel in the Old Testament is depicted as a vineyard God planted with great care intending that it should yield good fruit, but it had failed to produce the fruit for which it was planted and God was going to remove the hedge He had placed around it.
5. **A Hope of a New Vine:** Facing destruction, God gives Israel hope for the future. Isaiah says that hope is through a branch, a shoot that is yet to come. There will

come a time when a branch, a shoot, a choice vine will come that will bear the fruit Israel did not seem able to bear

- ◆ **Isaiah 4:2-3** *“In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel. <sup>3</sup> And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem.”*
- ◆ **Isaiah 11:1, 10-11**: *“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. <sup>10</sup> In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples- of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. <sup>11</sup> In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.”*
- ◆ The prophecy began to be realized when God sent the Son to become flesh and dwell among us as Jesus, the son of Mary. Israel was an imperfect foreshadowing of the true vine.
- ◆ Jesus is the genuine vine with all the perfections that Israel was called to develop but had never succeeded in doing. In the Messiah a new Israel would emerge. The members of this new Israel draw their spiritual sustenance from Jesus.
- ◆ Paul recognizes the New Israel as the Church and compares it with the old Israel in the metaphor of an olive tree from which branches are broken off, and new ones grafted.
- ◆ **Romans 11:17**: *“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, <sup>18</sup> do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. <sup>19</sup> Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” <sup>20</sup> That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. <sup>21</sup> For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. <sup>22</sup> Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. <sup>23</sup> And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft*

*them in again.<sup>24</sup> For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.”*

6. **Israel’s Downfall:** God warned the people of Israel repeatedly that they must “remember” what He had done for them. That memory should be sufficient to direct their behavior to produce the good moral fruit God expects.

- ◆ Danger and destruction came to the vineyard that was Israel. Isaiah 5:1-7 emphasizes God’s careful planting and tending of Israel as His vineyard but it produced only wild grapes. God declared He would allow His vineyard to be destroyed.
- ◆ And destroyed it was, not once but repeatedly – beginning in 721 B.C. with Assyria conquering the northern kingdom of Israel and carrying away most of the people in exile.
- ◆ People from Assyria were moved into the vacancy created in Israel. Intermarriage between the newcomers and the remaining Jews produced the Samaritans of Jesus’ day.
- ◆ Then in 586 B.C. Babylon conquered Judah, destroyed the Temple, and exiled many people. Later, Persia defeated Babylon and the Persian King allowed some exiles to return.
- ◆ The returnees set about reestablishing what had been destroyed. After a long period of national ups and down, Messiah was born, grew up, and began His ministry. He was rejected by the authorities and eventually executed.
- ◆ Again in 70 A.D. Jerusalem was destroyed. That time by the Romans who killed or exiled essentially all the people.

7. **Israel’s Hope:** For hundreds of years Israel’s hope for the future was based on Isaiah’s prophecy of a branch, a shoot from the root of the vine which was yet to come.

- ◆ Isaiah 4:2-3, *“In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel.<sup>3</sup> And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem.”*
- ◆ Isaiah 11:1, 10 *“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.<sup>10</sup> In that day the root of Jesse, who*

*shall stand as a signal for the peoples- of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.”*

- ◆ Isaiah’s anticipated One who would save Israel is likened to a choice vine coming from the stump of Jesse to bear the good fruit Israel had not been able to bear.
- ◆ That prophecy came true when the Son of God became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth.
- ◆ Jesus came as the True Vine of Israel. Israel’s former position as the Vine of God was an imperfect foreshadowing of the true vine.
- ◆ Jesus possessed the perfections Israel had been called to develop but could not do.
- ◆ In fact, in Messiah a “new Israel” would come into being. The redeemed people of the “new Israel” would draw spiritual sustenance from Christ, the True Vine, as branches of that vine. Paul recognizes this truth in his view of the Church as the New Israel.
- ◆ He compares it with the old Israel in the metaphor of an olive tree from which branches are broken off, and new ones grafted in (Romans 11:17-24).

**8. What is Next:** The metaphor of the “True Vine.”