

# TREES-SYMBOLISM

**God's Plan and Trees**-We read in Genesis 3 that Adam and Eve sinned by eating from this second tree. They brought sin to humanity and to the rest of creation. They were banished from the garden and, significantly, from the tree of life. The ensuing story of salvation is to bring humanity back to the tree of life: a setting of perfect harmony with God and one another in a restored creation. Jesus pays the price for our sin on a tree, another word for the cross. This dead tree becomes a symbol of salvation, pointing to the flourishing tree of life in the new heavens and new earth in Revelation 22.

**Trees in the Bible**-Within this grand story of redemption, trees figure prominently in many other ways. Benefits of trees are numerous and varied. Because trees are essential for human life and flourishing, tree metaphors appear frequently in the Biblical message. Between the tree of life in Genesis and in Revelation, how are we to live? Like a tree!

Psalm 1:2-3 tells us that drawing nourishment from God's Word makes one like a strong tree. The path toward success from God's perspective is best understood by delighting in the law of the Lord and observing a thriving tree. In Proverbs 3:18, wisdom is a tree of life that will lead to blessing. The righteous are compared to palm trees and cedars of Lebanon in Psalm 92:12. The palm tree refers to the date palm, a desert tree, while the cedars of Lebanon were the tallest and most massive trees in the region, located in the mountains north of Israel. Despite their differences, both trees were picturesque, strong, and long-lived—a fitting metaphor for a godly life.

When it comes to the New Testament, there is more to trees than Zacchaeus, the tax collector and tree climber (who climbed a tree related to the fig family, not a sycamore). Jesus used the mustard seed and tree to speak of the growth of his kingdom (Matt. 13), and Jesus used a fig tree to describe his second coming (Mark 13). In Romans 11, the apostle Paul uses an olive tree to explain salvation and the people of God. Both Jew and Gentile, separate people for millennia, come together now as one in Christ. The ability to graft branches into olive trees illustrates how two diverse groups become united.

When you are amazed at the beauty of the forest or the shape and stature of a majestic tree, what should you do? Worship. Trees lift their limbs in praise to their creator and in so doing point us to God. Psalm 96:12 states, "Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy." Isaiah 55:12 concurs: "All the trees of the field will clap their hands." And speaking of the prophet Isaiah ...

**The Bible Tree Guy**-Which biblical author mentions trees most frequently and seems to have the most arboreal knowledge? The prophet Isaiah. Which Bible verse lists the most species of trees and how many? Isaiah 41:19: "I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set junipers in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together." Just as God will supply trees that signal water sources and provide shade in the desert, God will abundantly bless God's people.

Isaiah prophesied the Messiah using a tree: "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse" (Isa. 11:1). The stump represents God's judgment because of sin. A fruitful tree was chopped down and appears dead. But the tree, likely an olive tree, is very much alive underground. There is hope! From the stump comes a shoot that becomes a new tree. Despite present destruction and despair, God is faithful and at work. Jesus will come to bring hope to the world. Additionally, the Messiah's arrival is described with a tree: "He grew up before him like a tender shoot" (Isa. 53:2). And when Jesus comes, what will his people be like? "Oaks of righteousness" (Isa. 61:3). For people around the world, oaks are a tree of strength, long life, and numerous benefits.

**Trees and You**-Take time to notice trees as you read God's Word and as you explore God's world. There is something special about them. **Trees frame God's redemptive plan.** How do they frame your life? I like to refer to the forest as the cathedral of God's creation. So when you need to pray, when thoughts are dominated by hurt and anxiety, go for a walk. Stroll among the silent sentinels that declare God's faithfulness, the towering trees that point to the heavens in worship.

As you plant trees, consider their benefits and count your blessings from God. As you witness trees grow, year after year, as new life appears each spring, consider the hope we have in Jesus Christ. This hope gives us peace in the present and great expectation for the future, as we look forward to the eternal tree of life.

We are blessed by their shade in summer, their vivid colors in autumn, and their protection from the wind year round. The winds are often gentle; they rustle the leaves and bring a slight sway to the sturdy trunks.

That bending and swaying in the wind has a strengthening effect on the trees. Whereas trees held up by stakes and supports can potentially grow weaker, those that are left to "fend for themselves" against gentle and moderate winds **grow stronger as their roots grow deeper.**

Like those trees, our faith is planted by the seeds placed by our ancestors. It grows over time under the watchful eye of teachers, friends and family, and the Light filtering down from above. Even though our faith, and that of others we know, can be strong like the trees and surround us, at times we are tried and tested through difficulties and doubts. Like a gentle wind, the Holy Spirit nudges us to move and bend. We lean into questions that can solidify our beliefs. **We grow into our understanding just as a tree's bark slowly expands around its ever-widening girth.**

**Trees- Symbolic research for Lesson #6** – SYMBOLS in our study with Robert Morris – More than Words. Prepared by Salt Shakin Sister Outreach and Ministry – [www.saltshakinsister.com](http://www.saltshakinsister.com)

When we face a crisis or difficulty in our lives, we tend to do one of two things. We turn to God for our comfort and strength, or we turn away. We pray and seek his guidance, or we look inward and take control of the situation ourselves. **How can we plant ourselves in readiness to face these challenges not on our own strength but by trusting the One who created us? What lessons can we learn from the trees?**

**First, we need deep faith roots.** Although that late-winter blast was powerful, it couldn't bring down the trees whose roots were firmly established. On the other hand, roots that have been cut, neglected, or deprived of water and nourishment will become weak, and the trees will topple.

**In the same way, our faith roots must run deep.** We can strengthen them through worship, prayer, Bible reading and study, and fellowship with other believers. When we tend them, our roots will hold strong and we will remember to turn to God in times of difficulty.

**Second, we must let go of the burdens of this world.** The bare trees in our woods that late winter day stood strong despite 60-mph winds because the wind had nothing to grasp onto to bring them down. Without any leaves, even under intense pressure, the wind could blow *through* the trees. At other times of year when the trees are laden with the additional burden of heavy leaves (or for that matter, ice or snow), we often find snapped-off branches and fallen trees, their large trunks splintered like toothpicks.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. When we hang onto the weight of this world and become consumed by earthly treasures, power, or success, we are more likely to break when things don't go our way and our laid-up treasure begins to crumble. Family struggles, relationship issues, unemployment, health problems, and financial woes; all of these are potential faith-breakers if we hang on too tightly to the things of this world.

**Finally, we will stand firm through difficult times when we turn away from sin and ask God's forgiveness.** The trees that snap in half during a storm often show evidence of weakness, rot, or insect damage in the heart of the fallen tree. As we investigate the wreckage, we find obvious decay that lay hidden before the strong winds blew.

Our spiritual lives are like the trunks of those trees. When we allow sins—pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, or sloth (or any of their relatives)—to rot or infest our lives, we are more likely to fall prey to events that can rock our faith. Confessing our sins will begin the healing process that is needed to endure the struggles that surround us. When the strong winds of adversity blow our way, we can trust in the God who forgives and heals, to see us through.

Like the healthy trees, reaching toward heaven, our faith will thrive and grow if we allow our roots to sink deep into the soil of God's word and surround them with Christian fellowship, prayer, and worship. As the gentle winds of the Holy Spirit cause our hearts to bend and sway toward God, our faith will grow stronger and more resilient.

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Casting off the cares of the world that burden us, we will stand strong in the face of life's stormy gales, knowing our treasure is not of this world. Confessing the sins that rot us from the inside out, we will be forgiven by the one who was nailed, for our sakes, to a tree. He gave his life so that we could live, growing ever closer to him.

Like the towering oak and sturdy maple, let us reach our hands toward heaven in praise of the One who gives us life and sustains us through the storms!