

Ezekiel 15: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] ezekiel chapter fifteen and the word of the lord came to me son of man how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest is wood taken from it to make anything do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it behold it is given to the fire for fuel when the fire has consumed both ends of it and the middle of it is charred is it useful for anything behold when it was whole it was used for nothing how much less when the fire has consumed it and it is charred can it ever be used for anything therefore thus says the lord god like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest which i have given to the fire for fuel so have i given up the inhabitants of jerusalem and i will set my face against them though they escape from the fire the fire shall yet consume them and you will know that i am the lord when i set my face against them and i will make the land desolate because they have acted faithlessly declares the lord god ezekiel chapter 15 contains just one short oracle in which israel is compared to a vine daniel block suggests that some connection might be seen between this oracle and the second oracle of the preceding chapter in the words how much less of verse 5 which he sees as relating to chapter 14 verse 21 for thus says the lord god how much more when i send upon jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment sword famine wild beasts and pestilence to cut off from it man and beast block also sees verse 8 with its resemblances to chapter 14 verses 21 to 23 as giving further substance to these connections the oracle consists of a metaphor the wood of the vine followed by an interpretation concluding with a recognition formula and you will know that i am the lord the house of israel was compared to a vine on several occasions in scripture most notably isaiah chapter 5 and psalm 80 isaiah chapter 5 verses 1 to 7 let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard my beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill 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 and now oh inhabitants of jerusalem and men of judah judge between me and my vineyard 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 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 i will make it a waste it shall not be pruned or hoed and briars and thorns shall grow up i will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it 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 psalm 80 verses 8 to 16 you brought a vine out of egypt you drove out the nations and planted it you cleared the ground for it it took deep root and filled the land the mountains were covered with its shade the mighty cedars with its branches it sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the river why then have you broken down its walls so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit the boar from the forest ravages it and all that move in the field feed on it turn again oh god of hosts look down from heaven and see have regard for this vine the stock that your right hand planted and for the sun 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 going back even further in scripture jacob uses vine imagery

in his blessing of the tribes especially in his blessing of judah in genesis chapter 49 verse 22 other instances of vine imagery can be found in places like deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 32 jeremiah chapter 2 verse 21 and hosea chapter 10 verse 1 vine imagery in several of these places is used to speak of israel's failure in some manner whether with its degeneration from a cultivated vine to a wild one or to refer to the destruction of the vineyard in the gospels jesus picks up on this imagery in speaking of himself as the true vine and also in telling the parable of the wicked vine dressers imagery of a vine will reappear in a couple of chapters time with ezekiel's parable of the eagle and the vine the vine imagery of this chapter develops a different comparison from those that we see elsewhere its focus is upon the useless character of the wood of the vine for any purpose but burning the chapter begins with a number of rhetorical questions about the wood of the vine underlining its uselessness one couldn't even fashion a useful peg or pin from it as joseph blenkinsop observes the contrast between the way that the imagery of the vine is used here and other places where it is used is noteworthy typically the vine is an image of fruitfulness and growth however here the vine is dead the question is whether the wood of the unfruitful vine is useful for any other purpose the vine is short-lived it only lives for about 40 years its wood is unsuitable to fashion any useful object from you can't build with it it's only possible services as firewood given the history of the use of the imagery of the vine for the house of israel the story implied by the dead vine would not be difficult to discern jerusalem's narrative has arrived at its terminus the vine has ceased to bear fruit and is dead is being cut down and the only question is what to do with this wood as it has no practical value for construction it will be used as fuel for the fire and when the fire has burned much of it and what remains is charred it is of even less use at this point jerusalem is fruitless dead and what remains of it has been greatly charred by babylonian invasions and mass deportations what remaining value does jerusalem have the parts of jerusalem that escaped the earlier fires of invasion would yet be consumed by later ones the vineyard of the land would be desolated it has no residual purpose or practical use a question to consider can you enumerate the different ways that vine imagery is employed in scripture