

TREES OF THE BIBLE

Inspiration from God and Creation





Nine Trees of Significance in Scripture



Woven throughout the Scriptures are references to many different trees. More than just symbols, the trees mentioned in the Bible provide veracity for the actual places, lives, and experiences of people and their interaction with creation. As author Matthew Sleeth highlights:

“Every significant theological event in the Bible is marked by a tree. Whether it is the Fall, the Flood, or the overthrow of Pharaoh, every major event in the Bible has a tree, branch, fruit, seed, or some part of a tree marking the spot.”

Here are nine of those trees, plus a few interesting facts about each species that add depth to the Story.



The Tree of
PROMISE

THE TREE OF PROMISE

SPECIES: KERMES OAK (QUERCUS COCCIFERA)

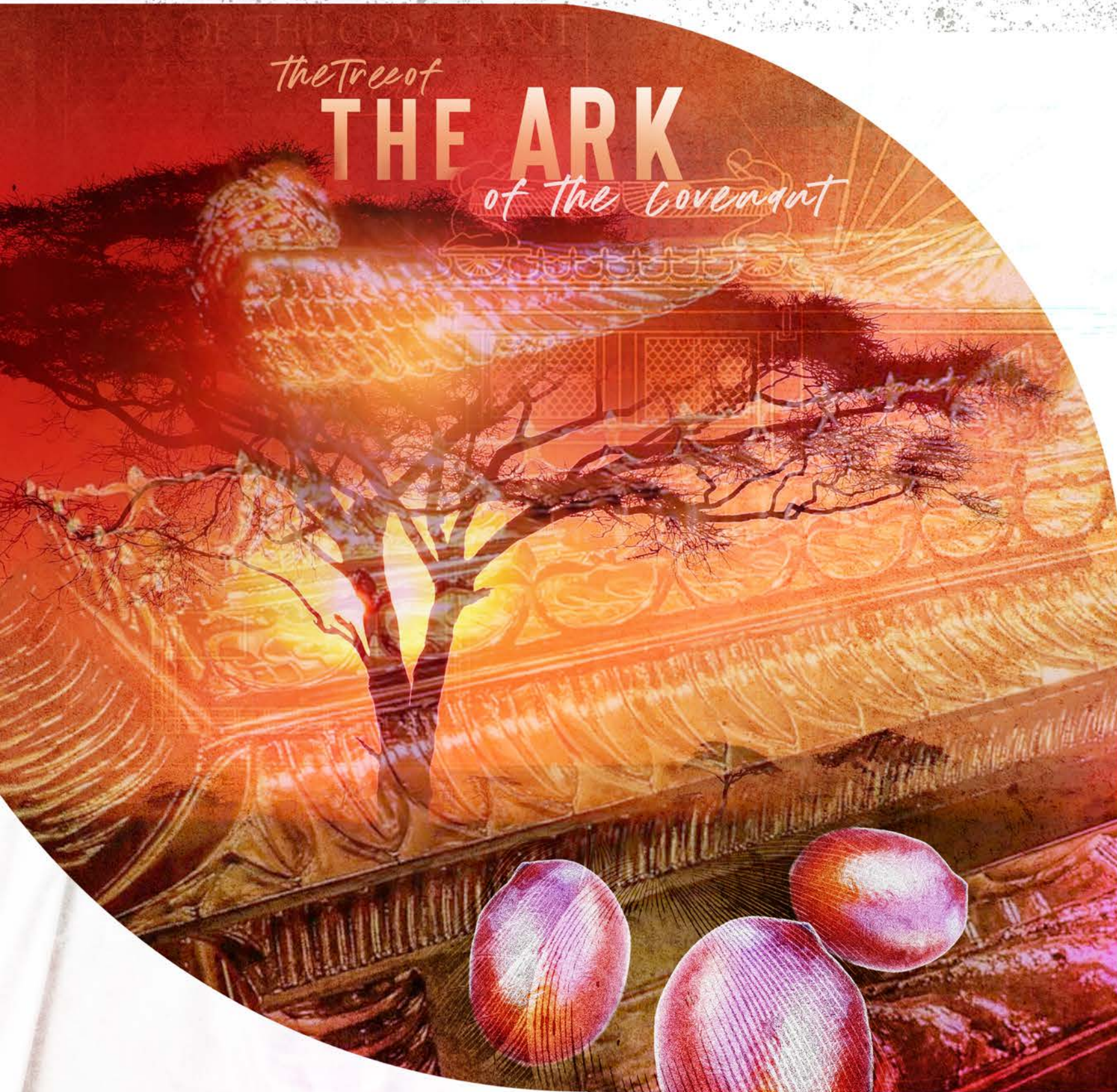
ABRAM TRAVELED THROUGH THE LAND AS FAR AS THE SITE OF THE GREAT TREE OF MOREH AT SHECHEM. AT THAT TIME THE CANAANITES WERE IN THE LAND.

GENESIS 12:6

In the Bible, oak trees are associated with faithfulness, protection, and strength and are often used as a metaphor for God. One of the most famous instances of an oak tree symbolizing these attributes takes place as God makes his covenant with Abram. Underneath the Oak of Moreh, God tells Abram that he will be blessed with offspring and land.

Today, in the West Bank, a site is venerated as the ancient location of this tree. Because of trees that are native to that area, the oak tree in the passage was very likely a Kermes Oak. This group of oak trees are found all over the Mediterranean Basin and fare well in rain-scarce areas. Because of their durability, a wide variety of birds, foxes, rodents, and boars build homes in their shade and thickets.

The Tree of
THE ARK
of the Covenant



THE TREE OF THE ARK

SPECIES: RED ACACIA (VACHELLIA SEYAL)

THAT PERSON IS LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY STREAMS OF WATER, WHICH YIELDS ITS FRUIT IN SEASON AND WHOSE LEAF DOES NOT WITHER—WHATEVER THEY DO PROSPERS.

PSALM 1:3

One of the most important items mentioned in the Old Testament is the Ark of the Covenant, and in Exodus, the craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiab build the Ark of the Covenant to the specifications given to them by God, relayed by Moses. The wood used in constructing the Ark is acacia wood, which is also used in the construction of the table, altar, and tabernacle. The acacia is also believed to be the kind of tree referenced in Psalms as a metaphor for a righteous person.

In desert landscapes, acacia trees frequently stand out because of their towering size. They grow slowly and live long; their bark, wood, and gum serve many medicinal purposes. Acacia wood is dense due to an uncommon, angular grain pattern. This makes it an especially durable material. It is also unappealing to insects and resistant to decay. It's no surprise that something like the Ark of the Covenant was made with acacia wood and gold, two materials associated with purity.





The Tree of
ABUNDANCE

THE TREE OF ABUNDANCE

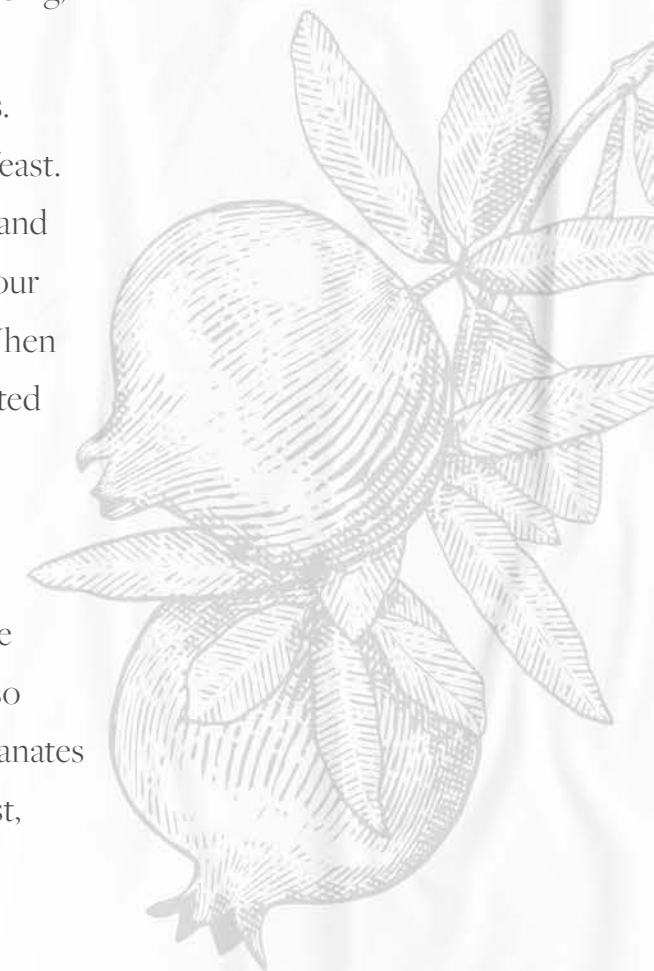
SPECIES: POMEGRANATE (PUNICA GRANATUM)

**YOUR TEMPLES BEHIND YOUR VEIL
ARE LIKE THE HALVES OF
A POMEGRANATE.**

SONG OF SONGS 6:7

In Scripture, pomegranates are typically associated with blessing, abundance, fruitfulness, and prosperity, and many writers of Scripture incorporated these associations in artistic fashions. Pomegranates are frequently used in scenes that describe a feast. Pomegranates were used decoratively around priests' robes and temple designs. In Song of Songs, one lover tells another, "your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil." When the Israelites enter the Promised Land, pomegranates are listed among the diverse plant life that finds them there.

Pomegranate trees thrive in warmer climates and are native to an area that stretches from the Middle East to India. Trade brought the plant to China and Southeast Asia, and it has also found the ability to thrive in Mexico and California. Pomegranates feature prominently in many cuisines around the Middle East, often used in baking, as garnish, or as a juice.



The Tree of

STRENGTH



THE TREE OF STRENGTH

SPECIES: LEBANESE CEDAR (CEDRUS LIBANI)

SO GIVE ORDERS THAT CEDARS OF LEBANON BE CUT FOR ME. MY MEN WILL WORK WITH YOURS, AND I WILL PAY YOU FOR YOUR MEN WHATEVER WAGES YOU SET. YOU KNOW THAT WE HAVE NO ONE SO SKILLED IN FELLING TIMBER AS THE SIDONIANS.

1 KINGS 5:6

The Cedars of Lebanon are referenced an incredible 103 times in the Bible. They are used as material in the construction of King Solomon's temple. Their size is associated with strength, and they are used to describe a lover's attractiveness in Song of Songs. The Psalms describe God's voice as so powerful it will break the Cedar of Lebanon into pieces, and they compare a righteous person's growth as upward as a Cedar of Lebanon. This tree is so prominent throughout Scripture that one of its nicknames is the "Cedar of God."

The modern-day nation of Lebanon takes so much pride in its cedar that the tree's outline is featured on the country's flag. This tree is an impressive one indeed. Across the mountain ranges in Lebanon, these trees tower over the landscape. Growing over 100 feet tall, with trunks as thick as 40 feet, cedar wood is immune to insect disturbance and is used often in furniture, construction, and handcrafts.





THE TREE OF FAITHFULNESS

SPECIES: GREEK JUNIPER (JUNIPERUS EXCELSA)

**I WILL SET JUNIPERS IN THE WASTELAND,
THE FIR AND THE CYPRESS TOGETHER.**

ISAIAH 41:19

As a display of faithfulness, in Isaiah, God enables nature to flourish despite adverse conditions. “I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. 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.” Any of the trees listed could be on this list (and many of them are), but the juniper stands out for its height, long lifespan, and preference for high altitudes.

The juniper plays an important role in many Middle Eastern regions. Its ability to withstand extreme weather events benefits other plants and wildlife. Like many members of the juniper species, the Greek Juniper grows upright, even when erosion may interfere with its trunk. A mature juniper will emit about 50 tons of oxygen each year in exchange for sequestering a large quantity of carbon dioxide. It also moves and stores groundwater through its root system.



The Tree of HUMANITY



THE TREE OF HUMANITY

SPECIES: SYCAMORE FIG (FICUS SYCOMORUS)

EVERYONE WILL SIT UNDER THEIR OWN VINE AND UNDER THEIR OWN FIG TREE, AND NO ONE WILL MAKE THEM AFRAID, FOR THE LORD ALMIGHTY HAS SPOKEN.

MICAH 4:4

The first tree mentioned in the Bible, and one that we can find in many gardens today is the Fig tree. With large leaves and a candy like fruit, the Fig is featured in both positive and negative ways throughout Scripture. In its first mention, the fig leaves are used to cover the shame of Adam and Eve in an attempt to hide from God ... (Genesis 3:8) and there's an infamously fruitless fig tree that Jesus disparages in Mark 11. However, Figs are also a symbol of abundance in the Promised Land, and the cultivation of figs indicates flourishing, as in the book of Micah.

This contrast in the way Figs are portrayed show the brokenness of humanity but its ability to be redeemed through Christ. The Sycamore tree Zaccheus climbs in Luke, along with most references to Sycamores, is more likely a ficus sycamorus, or Sycamore Fig, rather than the occidental sycamore that is more common throughout the Americas.

The Tree of

INCARNATION



THE TREE OF INCARNATION

SPECIES: BOSWELLIA (BOSWELLIA SACRA)

AND GOING INTO THE HOUSE, THEY SAW THE CHILD WITH MARY HIS MOTHER, AND THEY FELL DOWN AND WORSHIPED HIM.

MATTHEW 2:11

For most people, frankincense is recognized as one of the three gifts of the Magi upon the birth of Jesus. The fragrant resin was often used in perfumes or on its own as a powerful aromatic, but Frankincense is much more than just a sweet smell. In Jesus' time, treatment options for a wide variety of ailments were extremely limited, and child mortality was particularly high. The gift of frankincense, along with myrrh, was one of the most powerful medicines of the day. This is a powerful symbol and reminder of Christ's incarnation, taking on human flesh.

Frankincense is made from the sap of the Boswellia tree, which grows around the Arabian Peninsula and across North Africa. The product has been beloved and widely consumed for thousands of years, but current demand is threatening the survival of the tree. Overtapping is a widespread problem, but efforts like the Save Frankincense Institute are working to help improve management of the trees.



The Tree of

PEACE & UNITY



THE TREE OF PEACE & UNITY

SPECIES: EUROPEAN OLIVE (OLEA EUROPAEA)

AFTER ALL, IF YOU WERE CUT OUT OF AN OLIVE TREE THAT IS WILD BY NATURE, AND CONTRARY TO NATURE WERE GRAFTED INTO A CULTIVATED OLIVE TREE, HOW MUCH MORE READILY WILL THESE, THE NATURAL BRANCHES, BE GRAFTED INTO THEIR OWN OLIVE TREE!

ROMANS 11:24

The use of Olive branches as a symbol of peace goes as far back as Noah's dove returning from its exploration with a freshly plucked twig. (Genesis 8:9) This revealed God's desire to restore life and peace on Earth. In Romans 11, Paul then uses the illustration of a grafted Olive tree to explain how people of different cultural and spiritual origins can all become part of one life, nourished by the same roots.

In Old Testament tradition, Olive trees are an expression of shalom, which is peace defined as perfect relationships between all people, all things, and with God. The association of Olives with peace is familiar around the world. Olive branches adorn emblems of agencies, like the United Nations, that have a commitment to promote peace. About 90% of olives are produced for oil, which is not only used for cooking across the world but also for religious ceremonies.





The Tree of LIFE

THE TREE OF LIFE

SPECIES: UNKNOWN

ON EACH SIDE OF THE RIVER STOOD THE TREE OF LIFE, BEARING TWELVE CROPS OF FRUIT, YIELDING ITS FRUIT EVERY MONTH. AND THE LEAVES OF THE TREE ARE FOR THE HEALING OF THE NATIONS.

REVELATION 22:2

Within the last few pages of the Bible is the depiction of an especially incredible tree, the Tree of Life. This tree stands at the heart of the New Earth. The bookends of Genesis and Revelation contain symmetrical illustrations of trees that provide a God-given source for life. The story of Scripture starts in a garden, and concludes in a garden around this tree.

The tree in Revelation bears fruit 12 times a year (we can interpret as constantly) and offers its leaves to heal the nations. While this isn't a descriptor of any specific tree species we're familiar with, the fact that tree products can heal and nourish us at all times is a sign of God's active provision. There are many scholars who think that the term "Tree of Life" might be a collective term, rather than a reference to a single tree since the tree "grows on both sides of the river." This is consistent with many native forests, which are often composed of interconnected trees. While one can speculate inconclusively about the specific details, what's important is the way this scene reminds us of how God's story is moving toward restoration and abundance, and that the natural world will be a part of it.



“Our God and Creator, we thank you that your invisible qualities are made visible through your creation. Thank you for the trees. Thank you that you’ve given them the qualities to inspire, heal, nourish, protect, and restore us in body and soul. Thank you that you created them to maintain the health, life, and balance of everything on Earth. They are a gift of love to us, and we worship you for loving us that way. Help us, God, to be stewards of the world you have given us, to love our neighbor, and to reflect your creative love to all around us - Amen”



Plant With Purpose is a Christian organization reversing environmental damage and poverty in nine developing countries around the world.

Our work impacts almost half a million people, and have planted more than 50 million trees, numbers we plan to double by the end of 2025. There has never been a more critical time for people of faith to show love to their global neighbor than now. Let’s work together to plant trees, restore the Earth, and help millions of people live with hope.






**PLANT WITH
PURPOSE**
FOR PEOPLE & PLANET

