

# MYRTLE TREES: A PICTURE OF ISRAEL

The myrtle tree (Hebrew, *hadas*) of the Bible was probably the common myrtle. Growing 4.6 to 6 m. (15 to 20 ft.) high, it has dark, shiny leaves and bears clusters of star-shaped flowers. The myrtle tree was common to Galilee and northern Palestine and Syria. It also grew around Jerusalem, but was rarer there. Zechariah 1:9–11 mentions that it also grew in the Jordan Valley. Its branches were used for booths in the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 8:15; cf. Lev. 23:40). It reminded the Israelites of God's goodness (Is. 41:19), by contrast with the brier (Is. 55:13). [From: J.I. Packer, Merrill Chapin Tenney and William White, Jr., *Nelson's Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 244.]

Myrtle: (*Myrtus communis*), a large ornamental evergreen shrub that grows in dense copses along rivers and streams. Its greens were used to adorn the booths at the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 8:15). The fragrant leaves were also used in perfume manufacture. The myrtle is a symbol of peace, joy, generosity, and justice. The name 'Hadassah' is derived from the Hebrew word for myrtle, *hadas* (Esther 2:7). [From: Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 672.]

The myrtle tree in Scripture is a picture and type of the nation of Israel.

## I. The myrtle tree is a picture of the nation of Israel.

### A. We see myrtle trees picturing Israel in the dispersion.

8 I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he **stood among the *myrtle* trees** that were in the bottom; and behind him were there red horses, speckled, and white.

9 Then said I, O my lord, what are these? And the angel that talked with me said unto me, I will shew thee what these be.

10 And the man that stood among the myrtle trees answered and said, These are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth.

11 And they answered the angel of the LORD that **stood among the *myrtle* trees**, and said, We have walked to and fro through the earth, and, behold, all the earth sitteth still, and is at rest.

12 Then the angel of the LORD answered and said, O LORD of hosts, how long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years? [Zech 1.8-12]

B. (Zech 1.8) We see the myrtle trees mentioned in a passage that deals with Israel during the dispersion, a picture of the greater dispersion of the Jews that began in AD 70 and has continued through our days.

C. In the above passage we see a "man" (v8) riding upon a red horse. This man (v8) is the Angel of the Lord (v11; he who stood among the myrtle trees).

D. (v8a) The Angel of the Lord (the manifestation of the Lord in our world) is among the myrtle trees "in the bottom" (in the low place).

- This is a picture of the humiliation of Israel (the "bringing down" of the nation) during the times of the Gentiles when Israel is in captivity (from the 606 B.C. until the Second Coming of Christ).

E. This same picture is seen in the Book of Esther, especially Esther chapter 2.

1. (Est 2.7) Esther's Hebrew name is *Hadassah* which means *myrtle*. She is a picture of Israel (the myrtle trees among which the Lord stands).

2. The Lord is present among His people, providentially caring for them and protecting them, just like we see in the Book of Esther.

## II. The myrtle tree points to the future restoration of Israel at the Second Coming and in the Millennium.

- A. In the desert God will plant the myrtle (e.g., from the wasted ruins of Israel past, God will bring forth life).

I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the **myrtle**, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together. [Isa 41.19]

- B. In the place of briers, the Lord will bring up myrtle trees.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the **myrtle** tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. [Isa 55.13]

1. This passage, just like Isaiah 41.19, speaks of the restoration of the creation during the Millennium (Rom 8.19-23; the curse of Genesis 3.17 is lifted at the Second Coming, the beginning of the Millennium).
2. The restoration of the creation in the Millennium will be the time when the times of the Gentiles (the fruitless briers) will come to an end and the Millennium will begin.
3. And because the Millennium will be governed by Israel, the head of the Gentile nations, we see the myrtle tree (Israel) taking the place of the brier (Gentiles).

## III. The myrtle tree points to the Feast of Tabernacles, the time when Christ will return.

- A. During the feast of tabernacles the Israelites made their booths/tabernacles out of myrtle branches.

And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and **myrtle branches**, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths [tabernacles, for the feast of tabernacles], as it is written. [Neh 8.15]

- B. The holy feast of tabernacles is a picture of the Millennium because Christ will return during that very same feast (which is why the whole world will commemorate His return each year during the Millennium by celebrating the feast of tabernacles).

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep **the feast of tabernacles**. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep **the feast of tabernacles**. In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD'S house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts. [Zech 14.16-21]

- C. That Israel uses myrtle branches in their booths/tabernacles shows us a picture of Israel forming an integral part of the Messianic Reign, the Millennium.