

# A Tale of a Vine

Once upon a time a gardener decided to plant a vineyard. He was the world's leading gardener; a fact that His critics would not concede. His reputation was very important to Him, and so He wanted His new vineyard to produce the finest grapes in the world. He planned to produce a fine wine that would be exported across the world, bringing joy to every country and great fame to His name.

The gardener searched for the most sound stock of vine until He eventually found one whose grapes seemed more succulent than any other. It was a newly cultivated vine - the only specimen of its kind. He wanted to be sure that the vine was truly what it appeared to be, and so He crushed its grapes, collecting their juice. They did not disappoint - in fact the juice was more sweet and flavour-full than He could have hoped. The vine was perfect, and so He bought it and renamed it - giving it a name that both identified it as His own and foretold great fruitfulness. His future reputation would be entwined with this vine.

The gardener was wise. He needed to build a vineyard, but in the meantime He knew He must prepare the little vine for fruitfulness. He planted it in a temporary plot beside the River Nile and began to tend it. He had to prune it back severely, because only by doing so could He make it more fruitful. This is a strange truth about vines - their wood is useful for one purpose only; to provide life and sustenance to their fruit. The branches must be pruned back to minimise the wood and maximise the grape. The gardener laboured hard under Egypt's scorching sun, and although it might seem strange to those who do not know the art of gardening, He loved the vine. He even whispered tender words to it as He pruned the branches, enriched the soil with manure, weeded, bent and tied the fruit cane, trimmed off unwanted suckers and trained the vine into shape. When the grapes became ripe He longed to taste them, but He knew that it was not yet time, and so He waited.

Meanwhile the gardener had bought a plot of land in which to form His vineyard. He chose a fertile plot on a hillside down which flowed a stream that had never been known to run dry. He worked hard to plough the land, digging out the stubborn stones and rooting out every weed. He prepared a thorny hedge around the plot and for extra security built a wall around the hedge. The wall was especially tall on the eastern side, for from that direction blew a harsh wind. No wild animal or greedy neighbour would plunder this vine, and no wind would pummel it. The gardener even built a watchtower in the vineyard from which He could keep vigil over His prized possession. Lastly, in the corner of the vineyard He built a winepress. This addition brought Him the greatest joy of all, as He anticipated the harvest, the pressing, and the joy that His fine wine would bring the world.

When the time was right the gardener brought His vine out of Egypt and planted it firmly in the rich soil of His vineyard. He took up His position in the watchtower and began His loving wait. He watched as the vine took root, and rejoiced as it spread its branches across that fertile plot. He never slept or slumbered as He kept His watch by night, and by day He continued His work of weeding and watering, feeding and tying, trimming and training, all the time whispering words of love. And He waited. There would be no harvesting of grapes until the vine had reached its peak.

Eventually the vine had grown tall and strong, and its branches filled the vineyard. The gardener's neighbours wondered in jealous amazement. They had never seen so loved a vine, nor one that seemed so full of promise. The gardener decided that the time had come for the first harvest. He cut away the bunches of grapes and carried them expectantly to the winepress. The grapes looked luscious - He could not resist the temptation to pluck one and taste. The grape yielded its juice in His mouth, but the gardener recoiled in disgust. In a reflex action He spat out the crushed grape. Its juice was sour. Perhaps it was only one bad grape in the bunch. He tasted another, but the flavour was the same. And another, and another, but every time His hope turned to bitterness. The vine over which He had laboured - into which He had poured His sweat and tears - was corrupt. It bore only bad fruit.

The gardener thought back over the preceding years of cultivation. Surely He had made no mistake. He was, after all, the expert gardener. His technique had been perfect. Perhaps the flaw was in the vineyard. He tasted the water from the stream – fresh and pure. He checked the soil – rich and fertile. He examined the wall and hedge – intact and impregnable. There was no other explanation – the vine itself, though grown from the most noble of stock, had become rotten at its core.

The bitter taste in the gardener's mouth seeped sorrow into His soul. Sorrow ripened into pain, and pain bore the fruit of righteous anger. He knew what He must do. He smashed the wall on every side. He tore out the hedge. No longer would He prune or trim the vine. No longer would He water or enrich the soil. No longer would He tie or train the branches. No longer would He whisper words of love over this wasted vine. Only words of judgement were on His lips.

And so the vine grew wild and unruly. Animals came and ravaged it, and the gardener's neighbours plundered it. The grapes may have been sour, but the taste of victory over the gardener they had envied was sweet. The East wind blew relentlessly, battering the vine into submission. The stream that had never failed dried up, and the vineyard became a dry and weary desert. The sun beat down on the withered branches, until one of them caught fire, and the vine was burned to a stump.

The neighbours laughed and scorned. They said the gardener had gone for good. Some remembered seeing Him retreat into the watchtower. Perhaps He had curled up inside and died. Perhaps He remained in there – a broken failure. Surely He had retired from the business of gardening. Yet, unseen by their faithless eyes, the gardener watched from His tower and waited. A few men of longer memory suggested that the gardener might know more than His critics gave Him credit for. After all, He was the expert gardener, and He had been in the business of nurturing life for longer than anyone could remember. Some even said that one day he would return from the tower and resume His tender care for the stump of the vine. On that day, they said, a new branch would bud forth.

Then one evening, in the cool of the night, the gardener emerged. He stooped over the charred stump and once again whispered words of love. From the side of the stump a tiny green shoot had appeared. The gardener smiled and said, "At last the time has come to bring joy to the nations. The fruit of this branch will be glorious indeed. This is my true vine".

#### **BIBLE REFERENCES:**

- A choice vine of sound and reliable stock (Isaiah 5:2; Jeremiah 2:21)
- Brought out of Egypt (Psalm 80:8)
- A fertile hillside is chosen for the vineyard (Isaiah 5:1)
- The Land cleared for it (Psalm 80:8; Isaiah 5:2)
- The vine is planted beside abundant water (Ezekiel 19:10)
- The gardener watches over the vineyard and waits for the vine to produce good grapes (Isaiah 5:2)
- The vine grew tall and strong and filled the Land (Psalm 80:9-11; Ezekiel 19:10&11)
- The vine produces only bad fruit (Isaiah 5:2)
- The gardener broke down its walls and tore out its hedge – He stops pruning the vine and abandons it (Psalm 80:12; Isaiah 5:5)
- The vine is plundered by passers-by ravaged by wild animals (Psalm 80:12&13)
- The vine is left withered in a desert place (Ezekiel 19:13)
- A shoot will come from the stump of Jesse – a Branch from his roots will bear fruit (Isaiah 11:1)
- Jesus is the true vine (John 15:1)