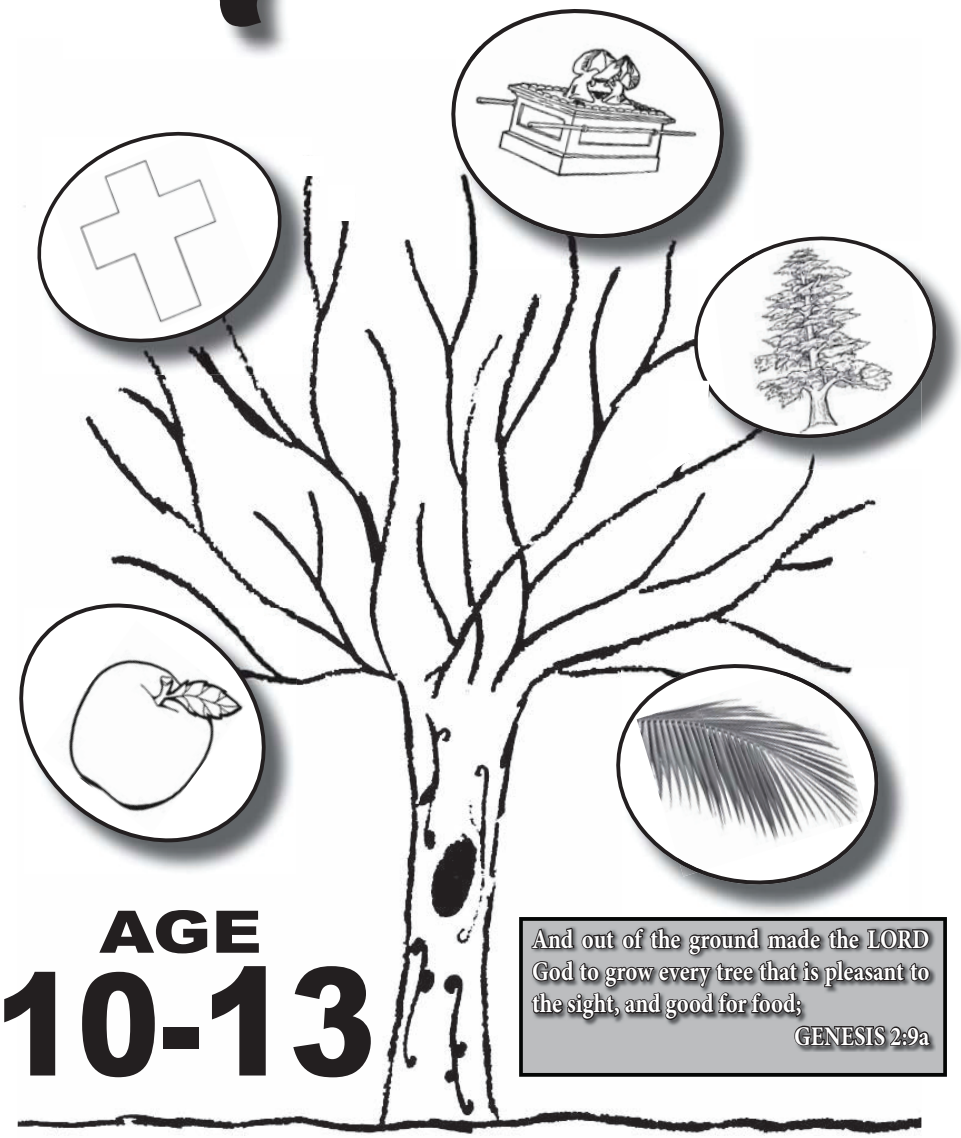
Trees



AGE
10-13

And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food;
GENESIS 2:9a

The Missionary Baptist
Vacation Bible School Literature Committee presents

Trees

Vacation Bible School Lessons for 10-13
Written by Sister Megan Carter

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LESSON ONE

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

LESSON TEXT
Genesis 2:16-17

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

Genesis 2:16-17
16. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:
17. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Introduction to the Series

Through this series of lessons, we're about to investigate the seemingly broad subject of "trees." When I set out to study and prepare to write these lessons, I wondered at how I was going to tie it all together to make any kind of coherent, connecting point. Our lessons texts start out in Genesis and finish up in Revelation. Their subjects cover physical aspects as well as symbolic.

I decided from the start that I wanted to take a different approach on these lessons than I normally take when writing. I thought I could tie the subjects together through the process I took in studying and writing about them. Inspired by a cartoon that my kids like to watch, I started out asking the questions a detective would ask: who, what, when, where, why, and how? I initially intended to use this only as a studying method, but found that it lent itself well to the conversational tone I was hoping to achieve with this year's lessons.

After I got to about the third lesson, I found that each one so far had sort of taken on a life of its own and had found their own connecting point, which was better than anything I could have hoped for, though I wasn't really surprised. I thought ahead to the other lessons and realized that they, too, would come around to that central theme very naturally.

What is that central theme? Jesus! Of course, it makes perfect sense. The whole Bible is about Him, after all.

So, students and teachers alike, go into these lessons with Jesus in mind. Make as many connections back to Him as you can. He's worthy of all our time, thought, and study, so get to know Him a little better this week. No matter what your relationship is with Him, you can always know Him better. And to know Him is to love Him.

I hope you enjoy these lessons as much as I have!

What?
The Bible says that God planted a garden eastward in Eden and that, in the center of that garden, He planted two trees: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve were given the privilege of living in this beautiful place and partaking in all of the plants there except for that second tree. God told them in no uncertain terms that if they ate from the Tree of Knowledge that they would surely die. Unfortunately, fewer than 10 verses later, the serpent enters the scene, peddling his lies, as he still likes to do. *Ye shall not surely die,* he told Eve*; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:4-5).* And so we witness the first case ever of discontentment, one of Satan's still-favorite tools. Eve had a whole garden of (literally) perfectly good fruits and vegetables, the likes of which we can't even imagine, but Satan's enticement peaked her interest. The prospect of what was no doubt a beautiful, new fruit coupled with the idea that she and Adam could be, with one bite, "as gods" inspired her to disobey her Creator and Friend.

When?
The Genesis account of creation tells us that dry land appeared on the third day, along with plants – specifically, grass, herbs, and fruit trees. However, according to the second chapter of Genesis, after God created man, He made a place especially for him and there He planted the Trees of Life and of Knowledge. Whether or not these two special trees were brought into existence on the third day of the creation week or later when God made Adam and Eve's beautiful home is a matter of assumption. It would seem safe to assume, however, that from the time man was created, there was a Tree of Knowledge as well as a Tree of Life.

Where?
It's clear based on scripture that the Trees of Life and of Knowledge were situated in the center of the Garden of Eden. Likewise, it's clear that the Garden was situated in the eastward part of Eden. The location of Eden itself, however, has long been a matter of debate. The physical locations are far less important, though, than the fact that God loved man so much that He provided them with this home that was perfectly suited to all of their needs. He gave them everything, including access to the Tree of Life and thereby, immortality. Furthermore, we can conclude that God visited with His darling creations there based on the fact that He walked in the garden in the cool of the day in Genesis, chapter 3. The only difference would be that, up to that point, Adam and Eve would have felt no need to hide from Him. Even more important is the fact that God continued to love Adam and Eve after they disobeyed. He did not abandon them to die in sin, but made coats of skins to clothe them. This is a beautiful symbol of how God covers our sins through the sacrifice of His Son.

Why?
In preparation to write this lesson, an unfamiliar question arose: *Why did God put the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden?* It's true that God's ways are higher than our ways

and that there are some things about God that we can never fully understand in this life, our human curiosity naturally perks up at the idea of God placing something right in the middle of Adam and Eve's living room, as it were, and then telling them not to touch it. One conclusion is this: Without a way to disobey, the act of obedience would mean nothing. God gave Adam and Eve the ability to choose whether or not they would obey and, since there was a method by which they could disobey, their obedience would glorify their Creator. Adam and Eve's obedience wasn't as precious to God as was their choice to obey. In the same way, God is concerned with the condition of our hearts. We may try and fail, as far as anyone can see with human eyes, but if our intention is serving and glorifying the Lord, we're sure to be blessed for our efforts.

Who? And How?

So who was affected by the presence of the Tree of Knowledge? And how do we reconcile those effects? It's obvious that Adam and Eve lived in the shadow of its branches for whatever amount of time they remained in their sinless state, so they were the only two humans who were affected by it in such a direct and physical way. Their act of disobedience in eating from that tree, however, indirectly affected every single human born since then, from their offspring downward. Because of that single act of disobedience, the seed of sin, almost like a gene in our DNA, is passed down from father to child, and down to the next generations after that. The bites of fruit that our first parents took from the forbidden tree ensured that every human after them was doomed to hell. This is the consequence we think of most often when considering the affects of Adam and Eve's disobedience, but Romans 8:22 says that *the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together.* Indeed, that first transgression brought sin not only into the human line, but into the entire universe. All of God's awesomely perfect creation was devastated by their sin of disobedience. Thorns and thistles began to choke out the flowers. Disease began to infest mankind. Creatures who once dwelled together in peace began to prey upon each other. Things and people died. Fortunately, our providential God, in His foreknowledge, had a plan. Just three chapters into the Bible, we hear the first mention of His plan when He lets Satan know that a woman's seed would bruise his head (Genesis 3:15). Of course, the woman's seed to which He was referring was our Savior, Jesus Christ. Truly, our Savior's coming death on the cross made Him a victor over Satan even at the dawn of time. The glory is all His, but since we who have been saved are joint heirs with Christ, we share in that victory!

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive (I Corinthians 15:21-22).

LESSON TWO

The Cross

LESSON TEXT
1 Peter 2:24

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

1 Peter 2:24
Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

What?

The events surrounding Jesus' death on that cross are fairly well-known among even the youngest Sunday School students. It is truly a blessed privilege to learn about Jesus and the accounts of His life presented in each of the gospels. Those who study this lesson likely recognize Jesus as God's Son – our Savior – and know the story of the cross from start to finish. Some may have been saved and have what we sometimes call an *experimental knowledge*, meaning you have sought God's mercy and experienced His goodness. It doesn't really matter, though, if you've been saved for just a few weeks or are a minister with an advanced theological degree who has been studying the Bible in depth for many years, it never hurts to get back to the basics. We can all benefit from reflecting on our Savior and how He took our sins with Him to the cross. So, while this lesson may be one of the most well-known, it's definitely the sweetest.

When?

Time is an unimportant issue when it comes to the cross since the plan of salvation was set in place before creation. Eternity is a concept that our imperfect human minds cannot fully grasp, but we believe that God exists outside of the realm of time as we understand it. Before God had even created time, He knew that Adam and Eve would disobey, necessitating a means by which they might make reconciliation. Some people confuse God's foreknowledge (meaning He knew it would happen before it happened) with foreordaining or predestination (meaning He planned it to happen or caused it to happen that way). God knew Adam and Eve would sin, but He didn't plan it that way. James 1:13 says, "...*God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:*" God is not the cause for any sin, but He knows about each and every sin we commit before we even think to commit them. The Creator of the universe and Ruler of all eternity loves us so much that He made a means of reconciliation that reaches beyond the bounds of time and into a realm so vast that our minds cannot even begin to grasp it!

The earthly "when," as it applies to the timeline of Jesus' life and death is amazing and intricately planned as well. We know to look in any of the 4 gospels for the details of Jesus' time

on Earth, but many of those details with which we're so familiar were prophesied in the Old Testament as well. The stories and family trees of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob aren't just interesting bits of history. A quick look at some of the names used in reference to Jesus shows some meaningful connections: Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Root of Jesse, Son of David. All of these names refer to Old Testament references to our Lord.

The timing of Jesus' death on the cross is equally awe-inspiring. Even in the physical act of His torture and crucifixion, God's plan was fulfilled. After Jesus rose from the grave, He spoke to the disciples, saying as it is recorded in Luke 24:44, "*These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*" And they were. Each prophecy - every single part of God's perfect plan – concerning the death of Christ came to pass before He died.

And so the real answer to the question of "when?" is this: All in God's time.

Why?

So why did Jesus have to die? Since God is all-powerful, couldn't He have made another way that didn't necessitate the death of His Son? God has always required a blood sacrifice as a means of recompense for sins. Even in the garden after Adam and Eve had disobeyed, their own attempt to cover their shame failed; only the covering that God provided was sufficient. And the covering He provided required bloodshed – the death of a creature to make use of its skins. From that point forward, God required the act of sacrifice. The first instance recorded in the Bible is that of Cain and Abel. Abel's offering was pleasing because he brought the "firstlings of his flock"; Cain's was not because he brought "the fruit of the ground." This same sacrificial requirement is present throughout the Old Testament as God's people lived under the Mosaic Law, and the Bible says in several places that these sacrifices smelled sweet to God.

Likewise, Isaiah 53:10 says that it pleased God to bruise Jesus. God was not happy to see His Son die on a cross, but it satisfied Him. And Jesus' death was the only thing that would. The ritualistic sacrificial acts that took place in the Old Testament were pleasing to God, but they were only pictures of the ultimate sacrifice of the promised Messiah that was yet to come. Hebrews 10:4 says, "*it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*" Without the foretold death of God's Son, those animal sacrifices would have meant nothing. The only blood that could completely cover our sins and be completely satisfactory to God is sinless blood. And the only sinless blood to be found was that of His Son. The only One who could bear the sins of every person who had lived and who ever would live is the One who knew no sin at all.

...we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:10)

Once again our original question brings us around to an unusual ending. Not just why did Jesus have to die, but why, after all, does God see fit to love us despite the fact that it was our sins, yours and mine, that held His Son to that cross? He loves us in spite of that, because when He looks down upon us, He is reminded of His darling Son who loves us with all the tenderness of a shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep.

Why did Jesus have to die? Because He loves us. He loves us oh so much!

Who? And How?

We know that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (I Timothy 1:15) and that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), so it isn't difficult to know who is affected by the cross and Jesus' sacrifice there. Jesus died for each and every person, from Adam all the way to the end of time.

The more pertinent question here is how should we respond to God's gift of His Son? What is an acceptable response to the willingness of Jesus to die in our place? Jesus died so that we could be saved. Since Adam and Eve's transgression broke the relationship between humans and their Creator, God provided a way *back to Him* through His Son. The first step is salvation, but *that's only the beginning.* In Mark 8:34 (and several other places throughout the gospels with slight variations in wording), Jesus said, "*Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*"

Jesus no doubt would have avoided the horrible death He experienced if He could have. He even asked God as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemene, "*if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*"(Matt. 26:39) We know He was willing, though, to lay down His life and suffer things He did not deserve. Considering the great price that Jesus paid so that we can go to Heaven to be with Him someday, shouldn't we seek the Lord for salvation so we can live in a way that pleases God? Striving for more than only gratifying our own desires and even facing many hardships in our lives doesn't seem like too much to ask when we hold it up in the light of Jesus' sacrifice.

We can never be perfect and these human bodies lack the capability to be as thankful as we should be for what Jesus did for us, but we should pray and always strive to be mindful of seeking God's will in our lives.

LESSON THREE

The Ark of the Covenant

LESSON TEXT
Exodus 25:22

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

Exodus 25:22
And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.

What?
The Ark of the Covenant has become a somewhat mysterious piece of our spiritual history as much speculation has arisen concerning it over the years thanks to popular culture. Fortunately, we can look to what we know to be absolutely true - God's Word. We also have the privilege of drawing conclusions, with God's assistance, about the things we read therein.

So what is the Ark of the Covenant or Ark of the Testament, as it's called in various places. Most people know the story of Moses. Long after he was the baby floating down the Nile River in a basket, he was the man that God selected to lead His chosen people, the Israelites, out of Egypt and through the wilderness. You may remember the part of the story when Moses went up to Mount Sinai for the second time and the Israelites, under Aaron's watch, constructed a golden calf and began to worship it. While those things were happening at the foot of the mountain, Moses was receiving more instruction from God than just what was on two stone tables. Chapters 25 through 31 are filled with instructions concerning how God intended His people to live and worship Him at that time. We call this collection of God's instruction the Mosaic Law.

Included in this law were the plans for a very special wooden box - the Ark of the Covenant. Every last detail for the Ark is there in the scripture, including its exact size and shape and how it was to be decorated. Also included were the materials with which it was to be constructed. Exodus 25:10-11 says, "*And they shall make an ark of shittim wood... And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it...*"

On top of the Ark, under the wings of two golden cherubim, was a special place that God referred to as the "mercy seat." And, as the lesson text says, it was there above the mercy seat where God would meet with His people and commune with them.

Who? And Where?
We know that Moses received all these instructions, but was he the one who actually built the Ark? No, he was not. God also delivered instructions concerning that, so it was a man by the name of Bezaleel who built the Ark (Exodus 37:1). The Children of Israel had the privilege and responsibility of following the Ark through the wilderness. When they stopped to camp, the Ark was placed in a special tent called the Tabernacle. It did not receive a permanent home until much later when King Solomon built the temple is Jerusalem. The Ark then came to reside within a special inner room, which we sometimes refer to as "the most holy place" or "the holy of holies."

And where is the Ark now? This is the greatly sensationalized question that has been raised in books and movies over and over again. There are many speculations and claims throughout the world , but most believe that it was destroyed by the Babylonians along with the temple (II Kings 25:8-9).

It's a safe assumption to say that the Ark of the Covenant no longer exists on this Earth, but based on John's Revelation we know that an Ark does indeed exist in Heaven. Revelation 11:19 says, "*And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and <u>there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament</u>: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.*"

This is not to say that the actual, physical Ark that once existed on Earth now resides in Heaven. The Ark's presence in Heaven is much more meaningful in that God's covenant with His people holds true both now and eternally. The fact that God keeps it in His temple is evidence of how very precious we are to Him. The symbol of His promise is always near Him. God will never forget us!

And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God… (Exodus 6:7)

Why?
So why an Ark? Why is this ornate chest so significant? Most things we read in the Bible can be seen from two different perspectives. So far we've looked at the Ark of the Covenant from mostly a physical or historical standpoint, but there is a much deeper way in which to view it. Many things in the scriptures are symbolic of beautiful, spiritual things that God wants to reveal to His children. The Ark of the Covenant is no different, and is what we sometimes call a "type of Christ." This means that God intended for His children to think of His Son when they saw or studied about the Ark. God's people of that time period used the Ark for a very specific purpose as a part of their worship. God's people now have the scriptural account of it to help us come to a greater knowledge of Christ.

Why did God choose shittim wood *and* gold to construct the Ark? Shittim wood is speculated by Jewish scholars to have been cedar of the highest quality, so we can assume that it was the best they had. Interestingly, shittim wood is also said to have been

incorruptible, meaning it did not rot. God could have instructed the builders to use pure gold for the whole Ark, but rather told them to use wood covered in gold. This covering relates to the glory of Christ, while the wood is symbolic of His humanity. Jesus was entirely holy, but He was also entirely human and the Ark is a symbol of both of those things. Similarly, we might recognize some similarities between the Ark holding the stone tables containing the 10 Commandments and Jesus' coming to fulfill the law.

Above all, the greatest symbolic similarity between the Ark of the Covenant and our Savior is the fact that He is, indeed, the embodiment of God's promise to us. Read Exodus 6:3-8. God spoke to Moses in these verses concerning upholding His promise to take the Israelites out of bondage and remove their burdens. God's children can take the promises in this scripture and apply them to themselves. When God saves us, He does indeed take us out of the bondage of sin and removes all the burden of guilt and shame we've been carrying!

God speaks to His Son in Isaiah 42:6 and says, "*I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;*" How wonderful to see God's tenderness in telling Jesus He'll hold His hand and keep Him. How precious that it's in such unfathomable love that He gives His own Son for a promise to us!

As a final thought, we could ask why we no longer practice temple worship with the sacrifices and other ritualistic acts that Moses and the children of Israel were instructed to do. Like the Ark of the Covenant, the Temple in Jerusalem was built under strict specifications including a thick veil or curtain that divided the most holy place from the outer rooms. Matthew 27:51 tells us that when Jesus died, one of the things that happened was that the curtain was torn apart from the top to the bottom. The ceremonial law of the old covenant – the one God originally made with Abraham and then reiterated to his descendents and finally to Moses – was perfectly fulfilled at that time. Jesus came to fulfill the law and, while He did not do away with it entirely, His death on the cross made it whole and perfect. A new covenant was set in place – and under that new covenant God Himself teaches us His law when He saves us!

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jeremiah 31:33).

LESSON FOUR

The Cedars of Lebanon

LESSON TEXT
1 Kings 6:7-10

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

I Kings 6:7-10
7. And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.
8. The door for the middle chamber was in the right side of the house: and they went up with winding stairs into the middle chamber, and out of the middle into the third.
9. So he built the house, and finished it; and covered the house with beams and boards of cedar.
10. And then he built chambers against all the house, five cubits high: and they rested on the house with timber of cedar.

What?
The cedars of Lebanon are another of those mysterious and awe-inspiring objects of the Bible, which hold both historical and spiritual meaning. We know that these cedars are remarkable in physical measurement as well as in age. Some that still live today are speculated to be between 1500 and 2000 years old, meaning they might have been alive and growing during the lifetime of Christ. Some of these have been measured to be around 115 feet tall and 40 feet around!

In the historical sense, we know that they were used by Solomon in the building of the Temple. Based on this fact alone, though, we know they must hold a deeper, more symbolic meaning, since most things used in the Temple were indeed representative of something spiritual. Symbolically, the Cedars are often compared to Christians. The comparisons are simple to spot with some study and are even more remarkable than the appearance of these awesome trees.

Why?
Psalm 104:16 says, "*The trees of the LORD are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted*." The Cedars of Lebanon are ancient trees – so old, in fact, that they seem to have always been there, leading some to believe that God Himself planted them as the verse says. Of course, we know that God is in control of all natural processes, so it could be said that God plants every tree. The Cedars, however, seem to have special significance in that they *belong to God*. Likewise, we know that since God created everything from the beginning of time, all people are His. However, saved individuals are like those Cedars, having special significance and truly *belonging* to Him having been marked by the blood of His beloved Son.

So, it follows that God would want His own trees that He planted for His glory used for the building of His Temple. Here is another comparison. God created us and saved us for His glory and uses His children to make up His church. Even in death, it is those of us who have been saved who will continue to glorify God and echo His praises throughout eternity, just as the Cedars carried on in the purpose of God's glory even after they were cut down for their lumber.

An interesting fact pointed out in a sermon about the Cedars of Lebanon, preached by Charles Spurgeon in 1863 is concerning the trees being full of sap. The sap is the life-giving substance of a tree that carries nutrients from the soil to the highest branches. The interesting fact about a cedar tree is that its sap flows freely at all times, whereas the sap of most other trees flows freely only one or two times a year. Cutting down a cedar tree is a sticky situation because sap goes everywhere! As the aforementioned verse states, they are "full of sap," or to state it in a different way, they are satiated or satisfied because of their fullness. A saved person should be similarly "full" of God's spirit and sustaining grace, always satisfied by His providence. When we try to remain close to God, we will be always flowing with His love and our "stickiness," so to speak, will rub off on anyone who comes near us!

Where?

Modern-day Lebanon shares its border with Israel and Syria and has a coast on the Mediterranean Sea. These impressive trees grow in the mountains of Lebanon and are now a tourist attraction to students of the Bible and everyday passersby alike. One of the first things we might consider about the Cedars is that they grow in a very exposed place. Picture in your mind a group of trees growing high on a mountain ridge. There is no protection for them against the snow and wind and if lightning strikes, they're likely to be hit. There is no stream that runs past them high on the mountain and the sun beats down on them day by day. Their physical situation surely looks perilous, but since they belong to God, they are entirely protected by Him. God alone supplies their needs and protects them as He sees fit.

I John 3:13 says, "*Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*" Even though we belong to God, saved people are to expect hardships. In most circumstances, we're blessed to infrequently endure physical hardships like hunger and homelessness, although these things are not unheard of. We don't have to worry about the elements, in most cases, because we have sufficient homes to protect us. The hardships we experience could be things like physical illness, sadness, or being mistreated by those around us. Life can seem pretty bleak because of things like these, but we must always remember, if we've been saved, we belong to God. He is able to protect and sustain us through any situation. *My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness (II Corinthians 12:9)*

Isaiah 55:8 says, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD*." It's important to remember that God doesn't see things the way we do. He sees everything in the past, present, and future and knows what's best for us. So, even if a situation doesn't work out the way we think it should, we should still strive to say, "Thy will be done."

How?

So how can we use all of this information to our advantage? In this lesson, we have only discussed a few of the characteristics of the Cedars of Lebanon and how they relate to godly attributes in a Christian. There are countless more comparisons that can be drawn. It could be advantageous to the child of God to do a sort of "character study" of these trees, listing their traits and finding, with God's guidance, how those things might fall in line with the life of a Christian.

A good place to start might be with Psalm 92:12-14, which says, "*The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.*" A saved person should first and foremost be flourishing and growing in his service to the Lord. It is only when a tree flourishes that he is able to produce satisfactory fruit. The same is true of a Christian. When we walk close to the Lord, always praying and studying His Word, we're sure to grow in things like love, joy, peace, longsuffering (patience), gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness (gentleness), and temperance (self-control), all of which the Bible calls "fruits of the spirit."

LESSON FIVE

Palm Trees

LESSON TEXT
Revelation 7:9-10

WRITTEN BY
SISTER MEGAN CARTER

Revelation 7:9-10
9. After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;
10. And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

What?
The mention of palm trees pulls up a ready image in our minds. Nearly everyone knows what a palm tree is. Not only that, but most people could also tell at least a little bit of how they fit into the Bible. Undoubtedly, even some of the youngest Sunday School students would have something to say about Palm Sunday. Through the course of our study this week, it seems perfectly fitting to finish up with palm trees. Conquerors of old carried palm branches in their victory marches and sometimes even wore clothing marked with them. So, we know that at the time of Jesus, palm branches were recognized as a symbol of victory.

The depth of the story of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as it's sometimes called, is much greater than the picturesque scene we recall from childhood Bible stories. As usual, the outward "story" is just the beginning.

The twelfth chapter of John is such a beautiful part of the Bible. Consider reading the whole thing, but for the sake of this lesson, read John 12:1-19.

When? And Where?
The beginning of this story really starts a chapter back when Lazarus died and Jesus raised him (John 11:1-46). Jesus had performed many miracles up to this point and had even raised two others from the dead, but never anyone who had been dead for so long. Lazarus had been dead for 4 days. He had already had all of the burial procedures performed on him and was laying in the grave.

A couple of things about the time and place of this situation are significant. John 11:55 says that "*the Jews' Passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves.*" Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived in Bethany, which being fairly close to Jerusalem, probably had a large number of travelers passing through on their way to the Temple. So, the fact that Jesus had raised someone who had been dead for several days was a big deal and the amount of back-and-forth in Bethany at the time ensured that a great number of people were going to hear about it. Furthermore, John 11:45 says, "*Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him."* It says later in John 12 that many of these Jews "went away," leaving their former beliefs, after hearing about Lazarus and coming to believe on Jesus. That was obviously a great thing, but, of course, not everybody was saved. John 11:46 says that some of the Jews "*went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done*." It was at that point the "powers that be" of the time started to worry about Jesus' influence and began to plot His death.

Who?
Discussing the issue of who was affected by Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem will not bring a specific answer, but it is significant nonetheless. After the Pharisees began to seek Jesus' death, He and the apostles went away for a short time. This is not to say that Jesus went into hiding; He just stayed out of the most dangerous areas, staying in a place called Ephraim, which was near the wilderness or desert. He waited there for the right time to come back into public. A few days before the Passover, Jesus came with his disciples back into Bethany to visit His friends.

The next day, Jerusalem was filled with a huge number of people who had come for the Passover and most of them had heard that Jesus would be there. They responded in a way that the government officials probably would have never anticipated. This is the scene with which we're all so familiar. John 12:13 says that they "*took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.*" The Pharisees were in shock, saying in verse 19, "*Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.*" In other words, at least in that situation, they felt pretty defeated by this one Man.

How many people do you think were there waving their palms? The Bible doesn't give us a figure or even really any clear suggestion of the size of the crowd, but it seems we can draw a pretty good conclusion. The Pharisees, men of great worldly power, were worried and based on that fact we can assume that the crowd was enormous. Think of the biggest crowd you've ever seen and imagine them waving palms and shouting at the top of their voices. It most likely looked like a sea of green and the noise was probably deafening. Jesus was receiving the welcome He deserved! It was indeed a triumph and a victory because, if only for that short time, it surely seemed as it every voice was raised in His honor. All for a Man riding a donkey. And the Pharisees were scared stiff.

How? And Why?
So it would be reasonable at this point to wonder how all this relates, since we all know how the story ends. Based on the events of that

day, it seemed like Jesus could rise up against any kind of government officials with that kind of number at His back. In John 12:27, Jesus says, "*What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour."* Jesus didn't want to suffer the things He did, but He knew that was the reason He was on Earth. Any sinful human might be puffed up by the events of that day, but Jesus' soul was troubled because He knew what must come to pass. We know, too, the shame and struggles Jesus bore for our sakes. We know that He died on the cross, like a lamb brought before the shearer, opening not His mouth (Isaiah 53:7). And we know that now He sits at the right hand of God, there to be glorified forevermore.

This brings us, finally, to our lesson text in Revelation, in which John relates one of many things he saw in his vision of Heaven. It sounds awfully familiar. He sees a big crowd of people, holding palms and shouting with a loud voice. Only in this scene, the Man for whom they're proclaiming victory isn't riding a lowly donkey, He's there beside the throne of God.

Some might say that He had truly achieved victory at that point, but the truth is He was no more victorious in John's vision than He was riding into the Jerusalem. Jesus is Savior. He's Savior now, He's the Savior riding on a donkey, He's the Savior in the manger, He's the Savior hanging on the cross. He's the Savior for all eternity, long before our time was created and long after it's destroyed.

The final culmination, and sweetest part of everything we've discussed in these lessons, is this. Why is Jesus' eternal victory important to us? Romans 8:16-17 says, "*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.*" When we're saved, we become God's children – His heirs – and joint-heirs or siblings of Jesus Christ Himself. Being saved is dying to sin and taking hold of the victory that Jesus secured for us with His death. So, the significance is that Jesus' willingness to lay down His life not only made Him victorious throughout eternity, it provides us eternal victory as well.

In eternity, the saved will stand totally redeemed around the throne of God, waving our palms, praising Him, and shouting about our shared victory with our Savior!