

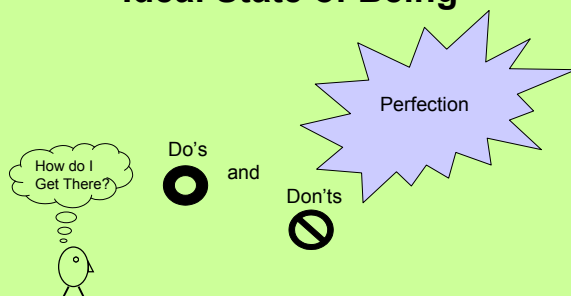
Ethnobotany and Religion

Lecture 45c
Plants in Christianity

World Views

- Ways of organizing information that include
 - Specialized language terms
 - Underlying assumption about the “way things work”
 - Often include elements from earlier world views or cultures
- Are encapsulated in religions
 - Polytheism
 - Animism & Ancestor Worship
 - Monotheism
 - Monism
 - Etc.

Ideal State of Being



Sacred Texts and Plants

Southern Asian Traditions

- Torah, Bible, Koran, etc.
- Vedas, Bhagavad-Gita, etc.
- Many other texts



Cultural Context of the Bible

- Oral Traditions of Pre-agricultural Groups
 - Gathering > Hunting > Agriculture
- Oral Traditions of Early Agricultural Nomads
 - Pastoralists (sheep, goats, cattle)
 - Arboriculturalists (figs, dates, etc.)
- Written History, Poetry, & Philosophy of Arid Land Agriculturalists in Small Cities
 - Grain Agriculture (wheat, barley, etc.)
 - Viniculture (grapes)

Cultural Transformation of Christianity

- Judaism
 - Originates in obscure nomadic tribe
 - Develops sedentary agriculture, larger population, writing, stratified society
 - Subject of empires: Slaves < > Lesser districts
- Christianity as a sect of Judaism
 - Rejection or supervening of Jewish laws
 - A-governmental cross-cultural dispersal
 - Syncretism & government manipulation

Key Elements of Christianity

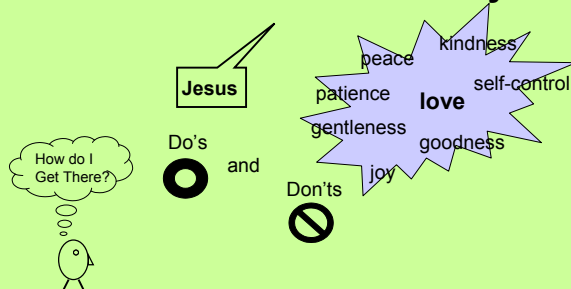
- An unseen God created everything
- Each person has a choice to do good/bad
- Choosing bad/evil has a consequence
- The consequence is separation from God



Key Elements of Christianity

- God has offered a way for people to overcome the effects of their bad choices
- As a gift, Jesus took responsibility for the bad choices made by all people
- Acceptance of the gift establishes a new relationship with God that is permanent
- A permanent relationship with God is called Heaven; A permanent separation from God is called Hell

Ideal State of Christianity



Christianity & Plants

- Plants and their environments were/are created by God
- Emphasis upon worship of the creator and NOT the creation
- People choose to be good/bad to plants and plant environments, however....
- Each person is responsible for their own actions (e.g., must answer for them)

Plants Mentioned in the Bible

- At least 230 species
- Most species from deserts or savannas
- Includes:
 - foods, spices, medicines, psychoactives
 - clothing, construction materials, ornamentals
 - weeds, fungi, wild & domesticated species
- Discussed in:
 - historical events
 - Poems, songs, and wise sayings
 - metaphors for spiritual ideas

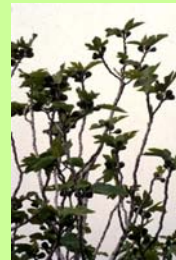
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Figs



Ficus carica

Ficus carica



Ficus sycomorus

Prosperity



Ficus carica

Figs (*Ficus carica*)

- Genesis origin account
 - Leaves? As clothing following first bad choice
- Isaiah medicinal remedy
 - Fruits used to treat skin infection
- Prophetic symbol of hope or prosperity
 - “To sit under one’s vine and one’s fig tree”
- Prophetic symbol of self destruction
 - Withering fig trees, loss of fruit to insects, etc.

2

Mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*)



Sensuality



Mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*)

- Genesis fertility account
 - Aphrodisiac and promotion of fertility
 - Psychoactive similar to other Solanaceae
- Song of Solomon 7:1 – 8:2
 - Imagery of the fragrance of intimacy

100's

Olives (*Olea europaea*)

Anointing



Peace

Olives (*Olea europaea*)

- Fruit oil uses
 - Food
 - Hair/skin tonic
 - Sacrificial offerings/coronations/confirmations
- Symbolism
 - Grafting of good varieties onto “wild” stems
 - Peace & Friendship (olive leaves with doves)
 - Prosperity
 - Sovereignty

100's

Wheat (*Triticum aestivum*, *T. durum*)

offerings

lifecycles



Wheat (*Triticum aestivum*)

- Wheat and “Corn”
 - Ripe grain vs. parched green grain
- Bread, beer, straw (bricks, baskets, bedding, mats)
- Metaphorical Symbolism
 - Agriculture
 - Stages of Life or other processes
 - Wheat and tares (*Cephalaria syriaca*)
 - Only the harvester can sort out good/bad
 - Flour and yeast (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*)
 - Small actions impact the whole person

100's

Grapes (*Vitis vinifera*)



Grapes (*Vitis vinifera*)

- Grapes, raisins, wine, vinegar
 - Critical foods
 - Water purifiers
- Vineyard symbolism
 - Require pruning for successful growth
 - Old vine. Young branches.
 - Are fragrant when in flower
 - Must be protected from animals/enemies
 - Harvest associated with judgment/evaluation

Date Palms (*Phoenix dactylifera*)

Permanence & Nobility



Date Palms (*Phoenix dactylifera*)

- Key oasis food & fiber
 - Dates, honey, wine, medicine
 - Basketry, building materials, needles
- Symbolism
 - Nobility and peace through authority
 - Tall, old trees as symbol of permanence
 - Associated with Asian/African Temples & Kings
 - Grace and Elegance
 - Name Tamara = Date Palm

Plants from Song of Solomon 7:1 - 8:2

Man

Mixed wine (*Vitis vinifera* +): the best wines
 Heap of wheat (*Triticum aestivum*): fertility
 Lilies (*Lilium chalcidonicum*): purity
 Palm tree (*Phoenix dactylifera*): graceful & elegant
 Clusters (*Phoenix dactylifera*): nourishing fruit in the desert
 Fruit stalks (*Phoenix dactylifera*): bunches of fruit
 Clusters of the vine (*Vitis vinifera*): future intoxication
 Apples (in this case *Prunus armeniaca*, apricot): sensuality
 Wine (*Vitis vinifera*): intoxication

Woman

Vineyards (*Vitis vinifera*): origin of intoxication
 Pomegranates (*Punica granatum*): fertility, flushed cheeks
 Mandrakes (*Mandragora officinarum*): psychoactive aphrodisiac
 Choice fruits: best of the harvest, reserved for a special event
 Spiced wine (*Punica granatum*): intoxicating sex

Plant information in this lecture largely drawn from:

Moldenke, H.N. & A.L. Moldenke 1952.
Plants of the Bible Chronica Botanica
Company, Waltham, MA.

Plant photos used in this lecture from:

The web site of ethnobotanist Lytton John
Musselman
<http://www.odu.edu/webroot/instr/sci/plant.nsf/pages/bible>

Song of Solomon 7:1 - 8:2

Male

"How beautiful are your feet in sandals O prince's daughter! The curves of your hips are like jewels. The work of the hands of an artist."

"Your navel is like a round goblet which never lacks **mixed wine**. Your belly is like a **heap of wheat** fenced about with **lilies**."

"Your two breasts are like fawns, twin gazelle."

"Your neck is like a tower of ivory, your eyes like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bathrabbim; Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, which faces toward Damascus."

"Your head crowns you like Carmel, and the flowing locks of your head are like purple threads; The king is captivated by your tresses."

"How beautiful and how delightful you are, my love, with all your charms!"

"Your stature is like a **palm tree**, and your breasts are like its **clusters**."

"I said, 'I will climb the **palm tree**, I will take hold of its **fruit stalks**.' Oh may your breasts be like **clusters of the vine**, and the fragrance of your breath like **apples**."

"And your mouth like the best **wine**!" It goes down smoothly for my beloved, flowing gently through the lips of those who fall asleep."

Female

"I am my beloved's and his desire is for me."

"Come, my beloved, let us go out into the country, let us spend the night in the villages."

"Let us rise early and go to the **vineyards**; let us see whether the **pomegranates** have bloomed. There I will give you my love."

"The **mandrakes** have given forth fragrance; and over our doors are all **choice fruits**, both new and old, which I have saved up for you, my beloved."

"Oh that you were like a brother to me who nursed at my mother's breasts. If I found you outdoors, I would kiss you; No one would despise me, either."

"I would lead you and bring you into the house of my mother who used to instruct me; I would give you **spiced wine** to drink from the juice of my **pomegranates**."