

OAK/TEREBINTH TREE

OAK TREE: There are many references to “oaks” in Scripture, but for our study today we are going to focus on three stories that most likely took place under a single oak tree. There are at least six species of oaks found in Palestine, some even being evergreen. The one in our illustration is a “Valonia Oak” (*Quercus aegilops*) and is a large deciduous tree and probably the species in our stories. Oak trees were considered sacred and symbolic of strength and long life. The primary uses of oaks were for shade, wood for oars and carvings and its acorns were fed to swine. Also from the acorns a black dye was derived. (*Zondervan’s Pictorial Bible Dictionary; Lion’s Bible Encyclopedia*).

GENESIS 12:1-7 Abraham’s Memorial to God’s promises and blessings.

In this account, Abraham builds an altar to the Lord under the terebinth tree of Moreh. Altars are used in many religions, but for God’s people they were more than places of sacrifice. They symbolized communion with God and commemorated notable encounters with Him. (*NIV Life Application Bible*)

The “Great Oak Tree” near Shechem was a well-known landmark clear from before Abraham’s time. Here God “appeared” to Abraham. This is the first recorded “appeared to” by God. God walked and talked with Adam, Enoch and Noah, but here as it is written, it would seem there was some form of visible manifestation. There may have been with the others, but it is not recorded as such. (*Genesis Record, p. 296*)

God renews his covenant with Abraham and lists His blessings on Abraham and his descendents. Abraham builds an altar as a memorial.

GENESIS 28: 10-22 Jacob’s Memorial to the place where he met God.

On the way to Padam-Aram to flee his brother’s anger and take a bride from the family line, Jacob camps near Shechem. He used a stone for a pillow. And he dreamed to a stairway going to Heaven with angels going up and down it. Above it was the Lord who makes a promise to Jacob. Next morning, Jacob sets the pillow stone up as a monument under the oak, put oil on it and called the place “Bethel” (House of God). And Jacob promises to build God’s house there and give God tithes.

The Rest of the Story (Genesis 35:1-15)

God tells Jacob to return to Bethel (now twenty years after the dream) and make an altar to God there. Jacob requests his family and household servants to abandon all remnants of idolatry (this probably included Rachel’s family idols). This included rings, earrings and amulets and even their garments. They buried

them under the oak at Shechem, which was now re-named “El-Bethel” (adding altar to the name).

Hosea 2:13 names jewelry that was associated with Baal – earrings and jewelry, although not evil in itself, in those days was often worn as good luck charms to ward off evil. The people in Jacob’s family had to cleanse themselves of all pagan influences, even reminders of foreign gods. (*NIV Life Applic. Bible*)

JOSHUA 24:22-27 Joshua’s Memorial to Israel’s promises to God.

Joshua, just before he died, prepared the people for his departure. He assembled the Israelites at Shechem and passed on to them the words of God (ch. 24:1-21). He reminds them of all that God has done for them and God’s covenant is renewed. He then sets up a large stone under the oak tree as a witness to the words of the Lord and their promise to “serve the Lord” (v. 21).

This tree was near the Lord’s sanctuary which was probably not a formal building or temple, but the “holy place” created at Shechem by the act of bringing the tabernacle there. (*NKJB study notes, Nelson*)

This great tree, which in our stories was used as a place of commemoration to Jehovah God and which was the site of altars and memorial stones, eventually became a location of idolatry.

Judges 9:6 It is the location of the crowning of King Abimilech (evil king)

Judges 9:37 It is called a soothsayer’s (or diviner’s) tree

Hosea 10:15 Hosea condemns the evil practices of Bethel

Abraham, Jacob, Joshua and other heroes of the faith built altars and piles of stones as memorials to God to help them remember the promises, blessings and acts of God on their behalf. How can we, today, build “memorials” to God? What are some of the things that we should remember? List some ways we can create reminders...

SALVATION (date on calendar, Scripture used)

SCRIPTURE (plaques on walls, bookmarks, memory)

GOD’S BLESSINGS (testify of them, journal them)

ANSWERED PRAYER (tell others, record it, journal it)