

## **FLORA OF THE HOLY BIBLE PART I – FRUITS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Holy Bible described several plants and the authentication of certain Biblical flora is still in debate. In the present paper, attempts are being made to workout the correct botanical identity of certain plants based on the description mentioned in the Bible. Bible is a genuinely documented book every thing mentioned in the Bible has a great significance. Present study is undertaken with a view to evaluate the biblical flora in correlation with the present day knowledge especially with the Ayurvedic system of medicine.

Key words : Bible Flora; Fruits.

Holy Bible was written in between 1445 BC to 96 AD. From the beginning of Bible history, the land of Palestine consists of variety of plants and the Jewish community used these plants mainly as their food supplement. In the Holy Bible there are ample references about plants and their uses. Based on the biblical information several successful innovations were made by curious researchers world wide. It is sincerely believed that the present investigation will open new vistas in plant based research. Present paper aimed to evaluate the fruits mentioned in the Holy Bible.

### **Almonds** (*Prunus amygdalus*)

The most important biblical nut was the almond, the tree of which is small with delightful whitish flowers in early spring before the leaves have sprouted. Almond has been known since early Biblical times (Holy Bible – Genesis 43:11)<sup>6</sup>. Hebrews called it ‘Shaked’, which means ‘hasten’. This may refer to the fact that the pink blossoms of the almond tree are the first blooms to appear in the spring (Holy Bible – Jeremiah 1:11-12)<sup>6</sup>. Almond nuts were carried to Egypt by Joseph’s brothers (Holy Bible – Genesis 43:11)<sup>6</sup>. Aaron’s walking stick budded and produced almonds over night and proved that Aaron was God’s man to assist Moses (Holy Bible – 17:18)<sup>6</sup>. The holy lamp stand had cups like almond flowers (Holy Bible – Exodus 25:33; 37:19)<sup>6</sup>.

Almonds are rich source of valuable proteins, fats and high calorific value<sup>2</sup>. Almonds also contain several minerals.

In Ayurveda seed kernels of almonds are being used. *Badam* (almond) is one of the ingredients in preparations like *amrtaprasa ghrta*, *Mahamayar ghrta*, and *Jivaniya ghrta* which are being used in wasting, head diseases and *vata rakta* respectively<sup>4</sup>.

Almond kernels are said to be highly nutritious demulcent and stimulant nervine tonic used as diet in peptic ulcer treatment. Unripe fruit is given as an astringent application to the gums and mouth. Almonds also considered lithentriptic and diuretic and their poultice are used in irritable sores and skin eruptions<sup>2</sup>.

Apart from the medicinal value almonds are extensively used in confectionary and cosmetic preparations.

### **Figs** (*Ficus carica*)

The Hebrew word for Fig is ‘Teenah’, meaning ‘to spread out’ Fig tree was cultivated in Palestine and other Mediterranean countries (Holy Bible - Deuteronomy

8:8)<sup>6</sup>. Even though it is not tall, its large leaves and widely spreading branches provide excellent shade. Sitting under a fig tree was typical of peace and prosperity (Holy Bible - 1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10)<sup>6</sup>. In biblical time figs were eaten fresh, dried or pressed into cakes (Holy - Bible - 1 samuel 25:19, 30:12)<sup>6</sup>. In some occasions figs were used as a poultice (Holy Bible - 2 Kings 20:7)<sup>6</sup>. Jesus used a fig tree to teach his disciples the need for spiritual fruitfulness (Holy Bible - Mathew 24:23; Luke 13:6)<sup>6</sup>. In the Bible<sup>6</sup> Isaiah recorded (Isaiah 38:21), a cake made of figs have been applied to the inflamed parts of King Hezekiah for cure.

Pear shaped fig fruit often forms before the leaves appear. These fruits ripen during summer and the fruits have numerous small seeds in their interior cavity. Figs are having high nutritive value. Edible part of the fresh fig contains proteins, carbohydrates, calcium, Phosphorus, iron, carotene, vitamin A, nicotinic acid, riboflavin, ascorbic acid etc. Figs contain high mineral content and traces of zinc also reported to be present<sup>2</sup>.

In ayurveda the juice of Anjira (Fig) fruits mixed with honey is said to be immediate cure for haemorrhage<sup>10</sup>. Figs fresh or dried are said to be demulcent, diuretic, emollient and nutritive and they are valued for its laxative property. Figs are used in the form of confection and syrups. Figs are considered to be useful in the prevention of nutritional anaemia<sup>2</sup>.

### **Pomegranate** (*Punica granatum*)

Pomegranate is a well known plant. Even in biblical time these plants were grown in gardens and *beside* houses (Holy Bible – Deuteronomy 8:8; Song of Solomon 6:11)<sup>6</sup>. Moses was instructed to embroider pomegranate fruits on the hem of the priest's robes (Holy Bible – Exodus 28:33)<sup>6</sup> and their form ornamented the columns of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (Holy Bible – 1 Kings 7:18; 2 Chronicles 3:16)<sup>6</sup>. The Hebrew word for pomegranate is 'Rimmion', known in Palestine since earliest times (Holy Bible – 13:23)<sup>6</sup>. In biblical time this sweet tasting fruit was used in many ways. Its juice was enjoyed as a cooling drink and as wine (Holy Bible – Song of Solomon 8:2)<sup>6</sup>.

Pomegranate is a good source of sugars and vitamin – C. The sugar content increases with the age of the fruit as well as tree. The fruit contains 27% of pectin (as calcium pectate) besides it possess protein, fat, fibre, iron, copper, nicotinic acid, oxalic acid, sodium, sulphur, carotene etc<sup>1</sup>.

From Ayurvedic point of view pomegranate is administered in the treatment of several diseases. In severe fever caused by *pitta*, parched grain flour mixed with fruit juice of *dadima* (pomegranate) is recommended<sup>8</sup>. Ripe fruit of *dadima* cooked in close heating and juice so extracted checks all types of diarrhoea<sup>7</sup>. Decoction made from fruit rind of *dadima* is being used in bleeding piles<sup>9,4</sup>. Linctus made of *dadima* seeds along with other ingredients alleviates excessive thirst<sup>8</sup>. Fresh rind of *dadima* with goat's milk is applied in case of freckles<sup>8</sup>. Infusion of the fruit rind with sugar and water is used in gonorrhoea<sup>8</sup>.

### **Grapes** (*Vitis vinifera*)

Grapes have been the principle agricultural product of Palestine since ancient times and the land of Palestine has rightly been called 'the land of grapes'. The Israelites found enormous clusters of grapes growing in cannon (Holy Bible – Numbers 13:23)<sup>6</sup>. Besides furnishing raisins and wine, the grapes provided juice that was boiled down to the consistency of molasses; the Hebrews called this '*debah*' or honey. This was probably the honey mentioned in Genesis 43:11 and Ezekiel 27:17 (Holy Bible)<sup>6</sup>.

Grapes contain sugars, iron, minerals, traces of bromide, iodide, fluoride etc<sup>1</sup>. Red variety of grapes appear to be rich in vitamin B. Grapes are good source of bi-flavonoids which are known to be useful in capillary bleeding in diabetes, oedema and inflammation from injury, radiation damage etc<sup>1</sup>.

In Ayurveda *draksha* (grapes) is being used in treatment of several diseases. In fever grape juice is being administered internally along with other ingredients<sup>4,8</sup>. During fever paste of grapes along with pomegranate kept in mouth removes dryness and abnormal taste<sup>3</sup>. In case of intrinsic haemorrhage juice of the grapes is used as snuff<sup>4</sup>. Grapes heated on charcoal fire and mixed with salt controls giddiness<sup>8</sup>. Cold juice of grapes alone checks the vomiting<sup>4</sup> and it controls the excessive thirst caused by aggravated *vata* and *pitta*<sup>4</sup>. In ear ache caused by *pitta*, breast milk boiled with *draksha* along with *madhuyasti* is used for filling the ear<sup>9</sup>. It is said in Ayurvedic text *draksha* taken with honey removes pain during pregnancy<sup>8</sup>.

### **Apples**

Different scholars identify the apple referred to in Joel 1:12 and the Song of Solomon 2:3, 5; 7:8; 8:5(Holy Bible)<sup>6</sup> with present day apple, quince and apricot. It was

concluded that the apple tree of the Bible was actually apricot (*Prunus armeniaca*). Apricot could fit the description of the 'apple' in proverbs 25:11 (Holy Bible)<sup>6</sup>. Apricot is a moderate sized tree about 10 meters tall. Fruits are round, with a yellowish skin overlaid. Flesh is golden yellow and sweet in taste. Apricot is good source of sugars, vitamin A, and contains good amount of thiamine, iron, protein, fat, fibre, carbohydrates, calcium, iodine, tannin, glucose, sucrose, fructose etc <sup>2</sup>.

In Ayurveda *Urumana* (apricot) is one of the ingredients in the preparation of *jivaniya ghrta* <sup>4</sup> which is being used in *vata rakta*. At some places oil expressed from apricot kernel is used for ear ache.

Apricot is being used in number of products like jams, baby foods, drinks, sauces, certain cosmetics etc.

### **Pistachio** (*Pistacia vera*)

The Hebrew word for this is '*botnim*'. Most scholars believe this was the pistachio nut. When Jacob sent gifts to Joseph in Egypt, he included nuts (Holy Bible – Genesis nuts 43:11)<sup>6</sup>. Pistachio tree grow 6 to 9 meters height. Nuts are oblong, linear to globose in shape. Greyish white bony keeled nut shell (endocarp) encloses light yellow to deep green edible kernel with a reddish coat. Pistachio nuts contain protein, fat, carbohydrates, fibres, iron, minerals, vitamin C, riboflavin etc <sup>2</sup>.

Pistachio is considered to be digestive, sedative and tonic. Oil extracted from pistachio kernel is used in confectionary as spice oil and in medicine <sup>2</sup>.

### **Mulberries** (*Morus species*)

The Hebrew word *baka* (weeping) is thought to have referred to the mulberry. When David fought the Philistines in the valley of Rephaim, the rustling of the mulberry leaves was his signal to attack (Holy Bible – 2 Samuel 5:24)<sup>6</sup>. Psalm 84:6 (Holy Bible)<sup>6</sup> refers to the valley of Baka, which literally meant 'valley of mulberries'. New-testament references to the mulberry denote the black mulberry (Holy Bible - Luke 17:6)<sup>6</sup>. Most English Bibles translate this word as Sycamine.

Mulberry fruit contains protein, minerals, carbohydrates, calcium, phosphorus, iron, carotene, thiamine, nicotinic acid, ascorbic acid, flavonoides etc <sup>2</sup>. Fruits of mulberry are eaten fresh or made in to juice stews, tarts.

### **Date palm** (*Phoenix dactylifera*)

Only one palm, the date palm, yielded fruit in biblical times and they are considered to be the best in hot conditions of the Dead Sea oases. Jericho was known as the city of palm trees (Holy Bible – Judges 1:16)<sup>6</sup>. The wandering Israelites reached Elim where there were seventy palm trees (Holy Bible – Exodus 15:27)<sup>6</sup>. The Psalmist considered it to be such a fine tree that he compared the righteous flourishing to one (Holy Bible – Psalms 92:12)<sup>6</sup>. Revelations 7:9 refers to the symbolic use of palm leaves (as ‘branches’) denoting victory, as when Jesus entered Jerusalem and the people stewed the way with leaves (Holy Bible – John 12:13)<sup>6</sup>.

Dates contain protein, fat, carbohydrates, fibre, mineral matter, phosphorus, calcium, iron, carotene, thiamine, riboflavin, nicotinic acid, ascorbic acid etc<sup>1</sup>.

In a number of Ayurvedic preparations *Kharjura* (dates) are being used. *Kharjura* along with some ingredients are being used in the treatment of cough, vomiting, *grahaniroga*, and hiccough<sup>4, 5</sup>. *Kharjura* fruit mixed with honey is useful in intrinsic haemorrhage<sup>5</sup>.

Dates are considered to be demulcent expectorant, laxative and are used in respiratory disease and fever<sup>1</sup>. Dates are widely being used in bakery and confectionary. They are made in to jams, cakes and dishes with milk, butter, meat etc.

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## सारांश

### होली बाइबल में वनस्पति - भाग-I फल

जी. वी. आर. जोजफ.

प्रस्तुत लेख में लेखक ने पवित्र ग्रंथ बाइबल में वर्णित वनस्पति एवं फलों का उल्लेख किया है। इस लेख में बाइबल सम्बन्धित फलों के उपयोग उनके शास्त्रीय नामों का भी वर्णन उपलब्ध है। प्रस्तुत अध्ययन में इन वनस्पतियों का तुलनात्मक विवेचन आयुर्वेद के साथ किया गया है।