

Another New Testament analogy used to describe the church has an agricultural theme. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard" (Matthew 20:1). The "Farm" analogy shows the church to be a place where work is done. In Matthew 13:3-8, Jesus takes us back to the farm again, this time to introduce a farmer scattering seed in his field. The seed represents the word of God (Luke 8:11) and the field represents the hearts of people (Matthew 13:19). The "Farm" analogy demonstrates how the kingdom of God spreads - through the teaching and preaching of God's Word. Paul said, "The things which you have heard from me ... entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2). The "Farm" analogy reflects the labor of God's people as they spread His Word and nurture the lives of others.

But, most importantly, the "Farm" analogy teaches Christians what God intended their purpose in life to be. In John 15:8, Jesus said, "By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." Here, the agricultural analogy turns to the topic of "fruit." The Christian's purpose in life seems to be the bearing of fruit. But, what does that mean? In the New Testament, there are three ways that "fruit" is defined as it applies to the life of a disciple. First, it is a way to describe proper attitudes of the heart. In Luke 3:8-13, the prophet John was asked to explain what he meant when he said to "bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance." John replied by denouncing superficial religion; then listed such traits as humility, generosity, honesty, kindness, and moderation. Paul listed nine qualities which he called "Fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-23. They are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Surely, we are bearing much fruit when these virtues exist within us.

"Bearing fruit" is also applied to the concept of doing good deeds. In Colossians 1:10, Paul encouraged Christians to be "bearing fruit in every good work." In Romans 15:28, Paul referred to the benevolent contributions of Christians to the poor as "this fruit of theirs." He also commended the church in Philippi for supporting him monetarily as he preached. He said, "Not that I seek for the gift; but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account" (Phil 4:17 - ASV). Surely, we are bearing much fruit when we do good deeds.

Likewise, "bearing fruit" may also be applied to the gathering of souls into the kingdom of God. One day, Jesus commented about the masses of people coming to hear Him preach. He said, "lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal" (John 4:35-36). Bringing souls into the kingdom of God, doing good deeds, and reflecting proper attitudes of the heart. In these things we find the Christian's purpose in life.

God considers the bearing of fruit to be very important. Long ago, ancient Israel was compared to the vineyard of the Lord. God had provided everything possible to help them be productive and to bear fruit; but they would not. In Isaiah 5:1-7 God lamented their non-productiveness and promised to lay them waste. To this same nation, Jesus later retold a similar parable and concluded with this startling pronouncement: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it" (Matthew 21:43). Because God's people let Him down, He sought another. Jesus told about a son who promised his father he would work in the vineyard, but he never did. Then Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you" (Matthew 21:31).

The kingdom of God was taken away from them and given to another people. To the church of Christ in the gentile city of Corinth Paul declared: "You are God's field" (I Cor 3:9). The people who truly belong to God will be found working to spread the kingdom and bearing much fruit as the "Farm" analogy teaches.

- 1. From the following scriptures, list three things the "Farm" analogy emphasizes:
 Matthew 20:1 _____
 Matthew 13:3-8 _____
 John 15:8 _____

- 2. According to II Timothy 2:2, how is the message of God shared with others?
- 3. What did Jesus say you must do to glorify God and prove to be His disciple? (John 15:8)
- 4. List three ways the New Testament teaches that you can "bear fruit":

- 5. Under each of these scriptures, list the attitudes which demonstrate the production of fruit:

<u>"Fruit of the Spirit"</u>	<u>"Fruits in keeping with repentance"</u>
Galatians 5:22-23	Luke 3:8-13

- 6. Explain how each of the following scriptures define the bearing of fruit:
 Colossians 1:10 _____
 Romans 15:28 _____
 Philippians 4:17 _____

- 7. Read John 4:28-36. To what is Jesus referring when He says to "look on the fields"?
 What kind of fruit does He mean for us to gather?

- 8. Read Isaiah 5:1-7; Matthew 21:28-31; Matthew 21:33-46; and I Corinthians 3:9.
 What did you learn about the importance of "Bearing Fruit"?