

# 2: Summer

## Definition

'The season of the year between spring and autumn when the weather is warmest, lasting from June to September north of the equator and from December to March south of the equator.

(Cambridge Dictionary)

## Key Verse

'... but you are to harvest the wine, summer fruit and olive oil, and put them in your storage jars.' (Jeremiah 40:10)



Summer market stall, southern France



## Opener

What does summer mean to you in terms of the natural world and also human lives?

## A time for toiling in the sun

(Ecclesiastes 2:18-25, 1 Kings 17:7-16, 2 Samuel 16:1-2)

The writer of Ecclesiastes is not known for his cheerfulness, and overall is commentating on the meaninglessness of life without God. Earlier in chapter two, he talks about houses he has built, vineyards, gardens and parks he has established, slaves, flocks, herds, silver, gold and treasures he owns (not forgetting the hareem!)

Here's a man driven to expand his empire and possessions by sheer work and effort to the point of pain and grief, 'toiling under the sun'.

This is a description of work/life balance which could seem quite contemporary. He compares this effort to the experience of

simply finding peaceful contentment in a much simpler lifestyle (v.24).

The story of Elijah and the widow is one about seasons that do not behave as expected. Without the heavy rains of late autumn and early winter needed to prepare the earth for cultivation, there would not be a good harvest in late spring and early summer. Now the land is dry, and God's provision for Elijah and the woman's family is both a source of comfort and strength.

In 2 Samuel is a story of David, now a fugitive from Jerusalem. It has been a swift exit from the city with his entourage, and now he's making a pilgrimage in tears to the Mount of Olives. Just beyond the summit he

meets the steward of Saul's grandson who seemingly wants to demonstrate loyalty to David by bringing both food and drink. It is easy in the heat of the sun to become exhausted. Despite suspicions about the

motives for this display of generosity, David gratefully accepts the gift.



Q) How easy is it to try so hard to achieve something in life that we lose focus on what's really important?

Q) Which begs the follow-up question of what are the essentials of life, and what could you manage without?

Q) Changing seasons are not just a historic phenomenon. How good are we at sharing what we have with those who have not?

## A time of relief from drought

(Read Genesis 41:53-57, Jeremiah 17:7-8)

El Niño is a warming of the sea surface temperature that occurs every few years, typically in the central-east equatorial Pacific. 'La Niña' is the name for the opposite side of the fluctuation, which sees episodes of cooler-than-normal sea surface temperature in the equatorial Pacific.

These huge interactions between ocean and atmosphere impact all over the world, causing colder winters in the UK, heavy rain in South America and drought in Australasia and the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. As this is being written, a warning has been issued that countries just recovering from the last El Niño of two years ago need to prepare for the possibility of another in the next twelve months.

In the story from Genesis, the Pharaoh may not have had the advantage of satellite

technology to help in forecasting the weather, but that was no barrier to God getting the message across that a famine was near, and Joseph, the interpreter of Pharaoh's dreams, is put in charge.

Storing a percentage of the grain harvested in the good years meant that when famine hit, not only Egyptians could be fed, but also people from surrounding countries who were in danger of starvation.

The short passage from Jeremiah contrasts those who turn away from God, the Sabbath and the Law with those who simply trust God. It's a moment of poetic inspiration in the midst of a difficult prophetic message.



Q) Joseph was held in high esteem by both the Pharaoh (who gave him gifts and high office) and God (who gave him wisdom and knowledge). Like Adam before him he is given authority over the land, but unlike Adam he delivers and in doing so saves many from starvation. Do you see God in action and working through people in high office today?

Q) How does the poem from Jeremiah speak into your faith?

# SAMP

## A time for gathering fruit that is ripe

(Read Numbers 13:17-27, Jeremiah 40:9-12, Leviticus 23:22)



Grapes on the vine, California

When Moses sent out his spies it was early summer and the season for the first wine grapes. Their report upon returning safely was not only that this was a land that could be farmed productively, demonstrated by the grapes which they had brought, but also included an assessment of the strength and capability of the inhabitants - points which Moses had asked them to investigate.

The term 'milk and honey' is a traditional description of a fruitful land. It was at God's bidding that Moses had sent the spies, but we might see it as useful preparation for a people approaching their promised land.

The passage from Jeremiah is from a very messy and distressing time in the story of God's People. Jerusalem had fallen to Nebuchadnezzar, and Jeremiah is in captivity when God tells him that disaster will overcome the city. The people are fearful of what might happen and Gedaliah (appointed over the towns of Judah) tries to quieten the fears of the survivors, suggesting submission to the conquering power, re-establishing normal living in the land and promising that he will represent them before the Babylonians.

The invaders had not used a 'scorched earth' policy when they entered the land, so food was available, and the people had time to gather the late fruits of summer to sustain them during their first bleak winter in the land. They would also need the harvests to pay tribute to the Babylonians. Time to get out the storage jars!



Q) Do you consider yourself at all guilty of taking the supply of food in your country for granted, and if so, why has that happened?

Q) According to research by National Geographic, the annual value of food wasted globally is estimated at \$1 trillion, and it weighs 1.3 billion tonnes. What does this say particularly about the developed economies in the world?

*'We cannot stop the winter or the summer from coming. We cannot stop the spring or the fall or make them other than they are. They are gifts from the universe that we cannot refuse. But we can choose what we will contribute to life when each arrives.'*  
(Gary Zukav)

*'For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy.'* (Aristotle)

*'Summer ends, and Autumn comes, and he who would have it otherwise would have high tide always and a full moon every night.'*  
(Hal Borland)

*'It will not always be summer; build barns.'*  
(Hesiod)

*'Summer has filled her veins with light and her heart is washed with noon.'* (C. Day Lewis)

# A time to be fruitful **SAMPLE**

(Read Luke 13:6-9, Luke 20:9-19, John 15:16)

Figs and vines figure heavily in the message of the gospels. Luke tells Jesus' story of a vineyard owner who had an unproductive fig tree taking up valuable space, and yet accedes to the gardener's request to give it one more chance to bear fruit. It's a story that echoes Isaiah's song of the vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7). What was the problem with the fig tree? Mainly that it was taking, drawing sustenance from the soil, but giving nothing in return. Barclay in his commentary says, 'In the last analysis, there are two kinds of people in the world – those who take out more than they put in, and those who put in more than they take out.'

Normally a fig tree reaches maturity by its third year. Some take longer. This parable introduces us to the gospel of the second chance, and apostles such as Peter, Mark and Paul are witness to that. But Jesus emphasises that there is also a final chance.

The second passage from Luke again alludes

to Isaiah chapter 5, but here it's less about the fruit and more about those who care for it. The vineyard is the nation of Israel, the tenants are rulers to whom it was entrusted by God. The messengers are the prophets who were ignored or killed and the son is Jesus. The crux of the story is that the place Israel should have occupied will be given to others.

Again, it's about taking and not giving, and about responsibility as a day of reckoning approaches. It talks of the patience but also the judgement of God. As far as the Pharisees were concerned this also had Jesus claiming to be the Son of God.

John also talks about responsibility – that of believers being chosen that they might go out and bear fruit that will last.



Q) What makes it difficult for us to become fruitful, and can we relate this to the fruit trees in an orchard?

Q) How important is 'the gospel of the second chance', and how easy is it to become complacent?

Q) Does the parable of the tenants speak to the Church?