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## PLANTS OF THE BIBLE

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It is exceptional that a country the size of Israel, which comprises most of what we think of as the Land of the Bible, supported over 2,600 plant species. Even more interesting since the country is 1/2 desert. The Bible mentions about 110 plants either by name or by description. Since the Old Testament was written originally in Hebrew and Aramaic, after 1,000 years of oral transmission, it is a challenge to figure out which plant one is actually talking about in a particular passage.

The New Testament was written in Greek with some of the oral sources from Hebrew and Aramaic. There have been several translations of the Bible and so there are discrepancies in assigning names depending on the horticultural knowledge or lack thereof of the translator.

Modern botanical knowledge and a study of the modern flora of the area has given researchers aid in a more accurate identification of the biblical plants. The general climactic conditions have scarcely changed at all in the last millennia. Even so, a fair number of plant names have not been specifically identified and some may never be.

The social structure, livelihood and domestic life of the ancient Israelite family revolved around agriculture. Vegetables were grown in small gardens near houses with or without irrigation. One would not find root vegetables like turnips or beets, but scores of wild edible herbs.

Fruit tree gardens were important, such as date palm, olive, fig, walnut and almond. Many religious laws centered on agriculture. Fallen sheaves of grain had to be left for the poor to collect and the corners of the fields were not harvested for the same reason. All crops were tithed for the priests. Laws prohibited gathering fruit for the first three years after planting, banned crossbreeding and established every seven years the Shmittah. Shmittah was a sabbatical year in which cultivation was prohibited so the natural yield of the land could be shared by all and the land could rest.

### JEAN'S LIST OF BIBLICAL PLANTS FROM HER PRESENTATION

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1. Acacia tree-Acacia radian - Exodus 25:10
2. Almond - Amygdalus communis - Numbers 17:8
3. Aloes - Aquilaris sp. Or Aloe vera? - John 19:39, Numbers 24:6, Song of Solomon 4:14
4. Broadbeans - Vicia fava - Samuel 17:28
5. Calamus - Acorus calamus or Lemon grass? - Song of Solomon 4:14
6. Carob - Luke 15:16
7. Cinnamon(Cinnamomum zelandicum)  
and Cassia (Cinnamomum aromaticum) - Song of Solomon 4:14
8. Coriander - Exodus 16:31
9. Cumin - Cuminum cymimum - Matthew 23:23
10. Dill -Anethum graveolens - Mathew 23:23
11. Etrog - primitive lemon (Citrus Medica - citron) - Leviticus 23:40
12. Fig -Ficus carica - Genesis 3:7, Numbers 13:23
13. Frankincense - Boswellia sp. - Exodus 30:34, Revelations 18:13
14. Garlic - Allium sativum - Numbers 11:55
15. Grapes - Vitis vinifera - Numbers 13:23, Deuteronomy 24:21
16. Henna -Lawsonia inermis - Song of Solomon 1:14
17. Hyssop - Origanum syriacum - Exodus 12:22, Psalms 51:7
18. Mint - Mentha longifolia - Matthew 23:23
19. Mustard - Brassica nigra - Matthew 17:20, Luke 13:19
20. Myrrh - Commiphora gileadensis - Matthew 2:11
21. Myrtle -Myrtus communis - Nehemiah 8:15, Genesis 35:4
22. Rue - Ruta chalepensis - Luke 11:42
23. Saffron - Crocus sativus - Song of Solomon 4:14

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- \* *"Plants of the Bible"* by Michael Zohary, Cambridge Univ. Press 1982
- \* *"Plants of the Bible"* by Harold and Alma Moldenke, Dover Pub., 1952

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