

*Secrets of the Vine (Breaking Through to Abundance)*  
Bruce Wilkinson  
A Critique

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“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he removes it, and everyone [branch] that does bear fruit he prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.” John 15:2

The meaning of the Greek verb αἶρω has come under severe scrutiny recently concerning its meaning in John 15:2. Bruce Wilkinson, author of *The Prayer of Jabez* and *Secrets of the Vine*, contends in the latter book that αἶρω (airō) should be construed as ‘lifting up’ not ‘taking away’,<sup>1</sup> as rendered by the NIV, NASB, ESV and other major versions of the Bible. In fact, Wilkinson states that ‘taking way’ “is an unfortunate interpretation rather than a clear translation.” He maintains that its use in John 15 is associated with the image of a vinedresser leaning over to lift up a branch which, then, extends to discipline in the Christian’s life.<sup>2</sup> Does Wilkinson’s translation square with the original intent of the Lord’s teaching as the Apostle John records it in his gospel? Essentially, the answer to this question involves three issues of exegetical and hermeneutical import: 1) the Old Testament historical context of the vineyard metaphor, 2) the lexical significance of αἶρω in the Johannine literary corpus, and 3) the literary context of John 15.

### **Historical Context of the Vineyard Metaphor**

John employs much Semitic language, imagery and thought in his gospel, both in allusions and quotations. The vineyard (כרם/αμπελων) motif, which includes the

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Wilkinson, *Secrets of the Vine (Breaking Through to Abundance)*, Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 2001, 32-33.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, 33-35.

branches (ἡ κληματα) and the vine (ἡ ἀμπελος)<sup>3</sup>, is one such potent image that John borrows from the writings of the Old Testament. It bears its relationship to the pervasive garden theme of the Bible that owes its existence to the original Garden (גן) in the land of Eden in Genesis 1-3. Since it is scattered elsewhere throughout the Old Testament, from Noah's vineyard in Genesis 9 through the historical books to the Psalms (e.g., 80:8-16) and Wisdom literature and on into the Prophets (Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 2:21; 5:10; Ezek. 15; 19:10; Hos. 10:1), we can readily assume a high degree of importance in canonical Jewish literature alone. Furthermore, vine imagery was found in ancient extra biblical sources, such as Homer, the papyri, the Septuagint (LXX), Epistle of Aristophanes, Philo of Alexandria, Josephus, and much more.<sup>4</sup> It was symbolic of Israel, the covenant people of Yahweh. The garden or vineyard was the setting in which God's people were to share in intimate fellowship with him and give him the worship he desires and deserves. The whole purpose of a vine was to grow, to mature, to prosper and to produce good fruit. Yet we find that most often the vineyard metaphor indicated Israel's insolent failure to produce good fruit, resulting in God's judgment.

Certainly, Isaiah's parable of the vineyard (5:1-7) indicates the judgment that Israel would incur for being faithless and idolatrous in the midst of her covenant relationship with Yahweh. The prophet is clear that, in spite of God's efforts to plant and take care of the vineyard, when he looked for a crop of good grapes, he found only bad fruit. The Lord asks, "What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done

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<sup>3</sup> The semantic domain of these three Greek nouns has been shown to have shifted over several centuries of use during the diachronic transition from classical to neohellenic Greek. See Chrys C. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 247-261.

<sup>4</sup> W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated and adapted by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, fourth edition revised and augmented by F. W. Danker, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, "ἀμπελος."

for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad (vs. 4)?” Isaiah, of course, identifies Israel as the vineyard that God planted. This vineyard had every advantage that could possibly be expected and yet produced bad grapes. And so, in vss. 5-7, the Lord indicates the following steps that he himself will undertake:

I will take away (הסר)<sup>5</sup> its hedge, and it will be destroyed (והיה לבער); I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it. The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice (משפט), but saw bloodshed/violence (משפח); [he looked] for righteousness (צדקה) but heard cries of distress (צעקה).

Note in vs. 5 the clear notion of “taking away” and “destroying” (lit., “and it will come to pass for consuming”). Furthermore, note the powerful *paronomasia* or play on words evident in vs. 7 where “justice” and “bloodshed” are very phonetically similar as are “righteousness” and “distress.”<sup>6</sup> This serves to underscore the point of judgment made by the prophet against the people of Israel.

Jeremiah 5 again relates how the southern kingdom of Judah has been guilty of obdurate rebellion against Yahweh in the form of backslidings that would seem to denote repeated apostasy (vs. 6). These people have preferred godlessness and moral corruption to honesty, truth and fidelity. They have rejected the covenant, forsaking the Lord of the covenant, as they have gone after foreign gods and committed adultery (vs. 7). Hence, the Lord, in vs. 9, says he must punish such behavior. Divine judgment was the inevitable

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<sup>5</sup> The LXX has ἀφελω the future active indicative of ἀφαίρεω which is cognate with αἶρω.

<sup>6</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament), Gen. Ed. R. K. Harrison, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986, 1988, 154.

consequence of such wanton defiance of Yahweh and such open revolt against the covenant.<sup>7</sup>

The prophet is instructed in vs. 10 to “go up through her vine rows and destroy. But do not execute a complete destruction; strip away her branches, for they are not the Lord’s.” The nation of Israel had deluded itself into thinking that it could, with impunity, ignore the prophetic pronouncements against it and shirk its responsibilities as members of the covenant. Yahweh declares in vs. 14, “Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, ‘Because you [Israel] have spoken this word [against God and his prophets], behold, I am making my words in your mouth [Jeremiah] fire and this people wood, and it will consume them.’”

R. K. Harrison has shown a perspicuous correlation between this text in Jeremiah and that in Isaiah 5 as well as John 15:1-6. He writes,

Though Judah is God’s vineyard (cf. Is. 5:1-7), the heavenly Husbandman permits the enemy to enter and pillage it. But destruction will not be absolute . . . even the Lord’s choice vine will be pruned severely. The *branches* of the vine have not borne the fruits of righteousness, and so will be burned up while the stock will be saved. This figure is reflected very closely by Christ in John 15:1-6. Israel and Judah have separated themselves from their source of vitality through infidelity, and thus cannot be fruitful as branches because they do not abide in the vine. What they have in fact produced has been the very opposite of fruits meet for repentance . . . despite the demands of God’s servants working in the vineyard, and therefore they can only expect a fiery judgment.<sup>8</sup>

A further text clearly indicating the vine imagery of Israel and her judgment by God is Ezekiel 15. This parable identifies Israel as the wood of a vine. But Yahweh asks

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<sup>7</sup> J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament), Gen. Ed. R. K. Harrison, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, 1987, 241. See also C. F. Keil, *Jeremiah, Lamentations, Vol. VIII* (Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, 121.

<sup>8</sup> R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Vol. 19, D. J. Wiseman, Gen. Ed.), Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973, 76.

the prophet, “Son of man, how is the wood of the vine (עץ הגפן) better than any wood of a branch which is among the trees of the forest?” The Lord continues to underscore the degeneracy of Jerusalem by explaining its inferiority to any other kind of wood. It is useful for nothing, not even as a peg in the wall on which to hang something. In fact, the Lord uses the figure of wood having been thrown on to the fire as fuel being subsequently snatched from the burning, but for what purpose?<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Keil notes that Jerusalem resembles a wild vine which has been consumed at both ends by the fire, while the middle has been scorched, and which is now about to be given up altogether to the fire.<sup>10</sup> And this is exactly what the prophet relates in vss. 6-8

Therefore, thus says the Lord God, ‘As the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I set my face against them. Though they have come out of the fire, yet the fire will consume them. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them. Thus I will make the land desolate, because they have acted unfaithfully,’ declares the Lord God.

The eminent musician, Asaph, speaks of Israel as a vine planted by God in Psalm 80:8-16. The Lord went to great lengths to redeem this vine from Egypt and plant it in Israel. Calvin states that the mention of ‘vine’ in verse 8 intimates “the high place which this people held in the estimation of God, who not only was pleased to hold them as his own inheritance, but who also distinguished them by peculiar honour.”<sup>11</sup> The language of the author in verses 12, 13 and 16 plainly indicates judgment probably at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Assyria, by the sovereign working of the covenant God: “Why

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<sup>9</sup> John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries), Gen. Ed. D. J. Wiseman, Downer’s Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969, 131.

<sup>10</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, Vol. IX (Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, 193.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. II, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998, 302.

then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?

The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. . . They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down . . .”

There are other Old Testament passages that could be brought forth to show the vine/vineyard symbolism that points to Israel’s calamities and judgment. The foregoing should suffice.

### **Lexical Significance of ἀρῶ in the Johannine Literary Corpus<sup>12</sup>**

The Apostle John uses the verb ἀρῶ twenty-four times in his gospel alone, once in his first epistle (3:5), and twice in Revelation (10:5; 18:21). The semantic domain of this verb encompasses the notions of ‘lifting from the ground’, ‘lifting with a view to carrying’, ‘carrying off or putting away’, ‘taking up or away’, ‘removing’<sup>13</sup>, all denoting a sense of ‘separation’, yet with different nuances. Of the twenty-four occurrences of ἀρῶ in the fourth gospel, eight should be rightly rendered in their specific contexts as ‘take up, lift up’ and the remaining sixteen must come within the notion of ‘take away, remove.’ John’s only use of ἀρῶ in 1 John denotes the action of ‘removing’ or ‘taking away’, reminiscent of John 1:29. The contexts of the two cited occurrences in Revelation demand a rendering of ‘raise, lift up, or take up.’ Jeremias<sup>14</sup> suggests that *by itself* ἀρῶ may be construed as ‘lift up,’ yet as Carson contends, when used “in the context of

<sup>12</sup> W. F. Moulton and A. S. Geden, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978, ΑΙΡΩ, provides the full range of the usage of ἀρῶ throughout the New Testament in many different authors other than John, such as, Matthew, Mark, Luke/Acts, and Paul in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians & Colossians. W. Bauer, *op. cit.*, ἀρῶ, also gives the meaning, “take away, remove” with no suggestion of lifting up. See also H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, (revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones), (1843), 1996, ἀειρῶ/αρῶ, which provides a more complete picture of the semantic range of this verb incorporating Linear B forms (ca. 1200 B.C.) as well as words and forms from papyri and inscriptions discovered up to the present day. This semantic domain includes also “take away, put an end to”, make away with, destroy”, “take away, remove”, hence, “destroy.”

<sup>13</sup> J. Jeremias, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. I, Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Translator and Editor Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, 1968, ἀρῶ, ἐπαρῶ, 185-186.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 185.

viticulture it is not the most natural way to take it. Despite arguments to the contrary, there is not good evidence . . . to confirm that lower stalks of grapevines were seasonally ‘lifted up’ from the ground.<sup>15</sup>

### **Context of John 15**

When we come to the Gospel of John, we are readily met with a conspicuous affinity for the Old Testament. Every chapter bears some reference or allusion to this time period. John the Baptist’s appearance in chapter 1, in relation to the Word (λογος), becomes a crucial salvation-historical link between the Old Testament prophetic ministry and the New Testament, since it is the Baptist’s primary mission to bear witness to the Light (φως) who is also the Word. The Apostle’s mention of the Passover Feast (13:1ff) conveys a vivid picture of this great redemptive event in the life of the Hebrew nation. His record of the upper room scene expresses the close fellowship of the Lord Jesus and his disciples, which is perfectly in line with God’s redemptive love and care for Israel and Judah. Significantly, the Apostle narrates the progression of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus in chapter 13 (vss. 10, 11, 18, 21-30 in which Judas leaves the gathering), the details of which prove to be crucial for the John 15 passage indicating a correspondence between Israel’s betrayal of God in the Old Testament and Jesus’ betrayal by Judas.

This brings us to the context of John 15. What is the Apostle relating to his audience by this allegory? This question is crucial, for the primary task of exegesis is to determine the author’s original intended meaning or ‘ancient literary competence.’<sup>16</sup>

John 15 teaches many truths; we will, however, limit our investigation to the syntactic and contextual factors of verses 1 - 6.

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<sup>15</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1991, 518.

<sup>16</sup> V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 33.

John 15 begins with the last of Jesus' "I am" sayings. Each of these sayings is rooted in the Old Testament where the prophets spoke for God and said, "Thus says the LORD." Jesus here is acting as a prophet, a spokesman for God when he says 'I am the true vine', the one that brings forth good fruit.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Jesus is more than a prophet; he himself is revelation from God (the *λογος*), the word personified. The Father, the covenant God, sent the Son into the world to reveal God (John 1:18).

Jesus is the *true* vine (η αμπελος η αληθινη), and indeed the true Israel, the one to whom God's covenant people pointed, in stark contrast to the Old Testament vine equated with typically apostate Israel or, as the LXX translation of Jeremiah 2:21 states, εγω δε εφυτευσα σε αμπελον καρποφοραν πασαν αληθινην• πως εστραφης εις πικριαν η αμπελος η αλλοτρια; ('Yet I planted you as a fruitful vine, a completely trustworthy one; how have you become a strange vine turned to bitterness!') The Father, as the vinedresser or cultivator, controls the whole process of growth, trimming and pruning; everything is under his sovereign care, for the idea of *fruit-bearing*<sup>18</sup> is central to the vine/vineyard imagery.

The second verse, taken in conjunction with others in this immediate context, establishes the fact of two distinct metaphorical groups: 1) branches that bear fruit (15:2b, 5, 8) and 2) branches that do not bear fruit (15:2a, 6). The latter class describes branches among the vine that do not bear fruit; they are completely unproductive (2a). Notice the contrast. "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he removes it"

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<sup>17</sup> Carson, *op. cit.*, 513.

<sup>18</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, 669, n. 8, notes significantly that John uses καρπος (fruit) 8 times in vv. 1-16, and twice only in all the rest of his Gospel.

(παν κλημα εν εμοι μη φερων καρπον αιρει αυτο) “and every one [branch] that does bear fruit, he prunes it so that it will bear more fruit” (και παν το καρπον φερων, καθαρει αυτο ινα καρπον πλειονα φερη). These dead, unproductive branches, the Father as the vinedresser takes away, removes, cuts off (αιρει).<sup>19</sup> The εν εμοι phrase of 2a, which is by ellipsis assumed for 2b, cannot denote Jews who were once in God’s vine or who were actual disciples of Christ. This is pressing the metaphor too far when *the clear import of this verse indicates that there are no true Christians without some measure of fruit.*<sup>20</sup> Without fruit-bearing there is only dead wood. This also contradicts the hermeneutical principle of the analogy of faith or Scripture interpreting Scripture. This becomes even more compelling in John’s gospel, since he gives strong evidence that true disciples are preserved to the end (6:37-40; 10:28).

In vs. 2b, John resorts to *paronomasia*, which, as Morris<sup>21</sup> says, it is impossible to reproduce in English. He uses the cognate verbs αιρει (“he removes”) and καθαρει (“he cleanses or prunes”) to refer to the two groups already mentioned. On the one hand, the Father removes or cuts off every unproductive branch and, on the other, he trims every fruit-bearing branch so that it may continue to be even more fruitful. The figure of physical fruit on the branches of the vine represents spiritual fruit in the life of the person

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<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to my colleague, Mr. Jonathan Mattull, for reminding me of Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:36-39 in which αρω is used to mean, ‘take away’, ‘remove.’ The context is unmistakably judgment oriented: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For just as the days of Noah, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and *took them all away*, in the same way will be the coming of the Son of Man.” The Greek of the italicized words is ηρεν απαντας, ηρεν being the imperfect active indicative of αρω.

<sup>20</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991, 515, *italics mine*. See also William Hendricksen, *The Gospel of John* (New Testament Commentary), Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953, 1979, 298 who says “just as the vine-dresser will take away the branches that bear no physical fruit, so the Father rejects those people who bear no spiritual fruit.” Cf. also James 2:14-26 which clearly shows the tie between faith and works.

<sup>21</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, n. 10.

who is “in Christ”, who lives in dependence on the Lord in a relationship driven by faith and trust. Such fruit is seen in texts such as Galatians 5:22 (the fruit of the Spirit), Matthew 3:8-10, 7:16-20, 12:33<sup>22</sup>, Romans 7:4, Ephesians 5:9, Colossians 1:6, Hebrews 12:11, and James 3:18. These fruits comprise good motives, desires, attitudes, dispositions (spiritual virtues), words, deeds, all springing from faith, in harmony with God’s law, and done to his glory.<sup>23</sup> Now *this* does refer to *discipline* in the fruitful Christian’s life. This is what Wilkinson is talking about in his book although he mistakenly identifies the discipline with the verb *αιρω*.

The following verse (3) becomes very instructive where the apostle uses *ηδη υμεις αθαροι εστε δια τον λογον ον λελαληκα υμιν* (you [all] are already clean on account of the word which I have spoken<sup>24</sup> to you [all]). The appearance of *καθαροι* is significant for two reasons: 1) it is cognate with the verb *καθαρει* in the previous verse and 2), as Morris points out, it helps us to see the meaning of the branches that are taken away.<sup>25</sup> This same structure is found in John 13:10 in which Jesus informed Peter during his washing of the disciples’ feet at the Last Supper that the person who has bathed has no need of washing anything except his feet, but is clean altogether; *και υμεις καθαροι εστε, αλλ’ ουχι παντες* (and you [all] are clean, but not all of you). This last clause explicitly points to Judas who was numbered with the disciples, had even had close contact with Jesus but was not truly his disciple, all of which is connected with

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<sup>22</sup> These three Matthew passages show a close resemblance to the imagery of John 15:2-6 through such figures as “the axe is laid at the root of the tree”, “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”; “you will know them by their fruits,” “every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”; “for the tree is known by its fruit.”

<sup>23</sup> Hendricksen, *op. cit.*, 298.

<sup>24</sup> The perfect tense verb *λελαληκα* signifies that the word Jesus spoke to them continues to be with them.

<sup>25</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, 670, n. 10.

the notion of ‘abiding’. The context of chapter 13, among other things, serves as an adumbration of the branches mentioned in chapter 15 that are unfruitful.<sup>26</sup>

From verses 4-10 the apostle openly records Jesus’ use of the verb μένω (“abide, remain”) ten times. John’s common use of this verb in his literary corpus is almost exclusively found in contexts of ‘abiding in God, in Christ, in the truth, keeping his commandments, loving one’s brother, remaining in the light’, and so forth. This verb assumes a powerful importance in the present context for the idea of fruitfulness, because it becomes clear that the bearing of fruit occurs only when the “branches” *remain* or *abide* in Christ the vine. The Lord unequivocally states in verses 4 and 5 the impossibility of anyone’s bearing fruit unless he abides in Christ. “Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

John 15:6 shows the *consequence* of non-fruit bearing vines mentioned in 15:2 as the context indicates a close connection between non-abiding and non-fruit bearing. John writes, εαν μη τις μενη εν εμοι, εβληθη εξω ως το κλημα και εξηρανθη και συναγουσιν αυτα και εις το πυρ βαλλουσιν και καιεται ”If anyone does not abide in me he is cast out like a branch and withers and they gather them<sup>27</sup> together and cast them into the fire and they are burned.” If there is no dependence on Christ as the vine,

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<sup>26</sup> The gospel accounts portray a noteworthy contrast between Judas’ bitterness and suicide, on the one hand, and Peter’s remorse and repentance, on the other. Cf. also Paul’s contrast of sorrow leading to repentance (a Godly sorrow) with sorrow leading to regret, or a worldly sorrow leading to death in 2 Corinthians 7:8-10.

<sup>27</sup> This clause strikingly begins with a singularity (If *anyone* . . . *he* is cast out . . . and withers) indicating individual responsibility for anyone brought into a relationship with Christ to abide with him. If he refuses to abide or rejects this close contact, he becomes one of many such people who ultimately reject Christ (they gather *them* . . . and cast *them* . . . and *they* are burned).

*the*<sup>28</sup> branch is thrown away and dries up. The passage has two aorist verbs used as timeless (or gnomic)<sup>29</sup> aorists that depict the completeness of the action that John is describing. These are followed by three (timeless) present tense verbs that simply describe the usual, less urgent tidying up process. Carson concurs: the branch that does not remain in the vine ‘is thrown away and withers’—the judgment is complete, decisive.<sup>30</sup> The imagery of destruction in this text brings to mind Ezekiel 15 (*supra*) in which the prophet used vine imagery to warn that if a vine failed to produce fruit it was good for nothing but the fire that symbolizes judgment.

### Conclusion

To answer the question posed in the introduction as to whether Wilkinson’s translation of *αῤω* squares with the original intent of the Lord’s teaching as the Apostle John records it in his gospel, the answer is a resounding, “No!” Dr. Wilkinson adamantly clings to the notion that “in both the Bible and in Greek literature, *αῤω* never means “cut off.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, when this verb is considered within the immediate and wider historical and literary contexts of John 15, one is compelled to attribute the meaning of “take away” or “remove” to it, even going as far as “cutting off.” The immediate context, in conjunction with the wider context demands such a translation since removing a branch involves cutting. The Apostle’s presentation of this allegory is clear in relation to both the Old

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<sup>28</sup> The Greek text includes the definite article which signifies a definite branch that is not in vital contact with the vine. See Morris, *op. cit.*, 671, n. 17.

<sup>29</sup> The timeless aorist is often called *gnomic* because it has been most readily recognized in proverbial saying and maxims [γνώμῃ], but is not confined to them. The aorist tense is often used to express general truth in contexts with no particular time reference. The aorist stresses the completeness of an action involving some degree of emphasis. See K. L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek: An Aspectual Approach*, New York: Peter Lang, 1994, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Carson, *op. cit.*, 519.

<sup>31</sup> Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 33.

Testament contexts of the blessings and the consequences of Israel's faithfulness and faithlessness in her covenant relationship with Yahweh and the new covenant relationship with God the Father through Christ. The Lord Jesus requires that the one who follows him abides in him, loves others, keeps his word and becomes fruitful. This fruitfulness will in no way occur apart from Christ the vine. As noted above, fruitfulness comes only through the Lord's work in the life of the one who is vitally dependent on him. If, however, there is no dependence on Jesus, there will be no fruit eventually resulting in one's removal from the vine according to the Lord's sovereign time frame.

Evidence from the ancient world for the lower shoots or branches on a grape vine to be lifted up from the ground is lacking. Wilkinson gets the "proof" for his thesis from the modern world of vineyards and not from the ancient world of the Near East. His citations from Scripture are selective and he makes no effort to ground his teaching in the Word of God, ignoring *context* altogether and rejecting any relationship between verses 2 and 6 in John 15. His book is full of anecdotes, testimonials, and techniques instead of substantive biblical instruction.

Wilkinson's book is simplistic, shallow, and appears to be yet another overly optimistic self help guide designed to give his readers an easy acquisition of whatever abundance they may desire. This book is filled with numerous misrepresentations regarding the idea of discipline which he asserts is bound up in the verb  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omega$ . Wilkinson notes that "it's all up to you."<sup>32</sup> In other words, the discipline doesn't have to continue. It's all up to me. I will only experience pain as long as I hang on to my sin. He mentions avoiding "needless and extended discipline." He omits any mention of difficult and time consuming tasks that are requisite for building and maintaining all kinds of relationships

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<sup>32</sup> Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 39.

in life. Those who contend with extensive unemployment, making it difficult to provide for family necessities, or perhaps someone suffering from severe sickness may experience emotional anguish, feeling as though God is disciplining them because of some sin in their lives. This can be terribly misleading and disillusioning for those who are struggling with perseverance through hardships of every kind. What is needed here is a fidelity to Scripture and sound expository teaching that truly informs those in the church of Jesus Christ how to live and abide each day with him, dependent on his grace for fruitfulness.