

Parable of the Date Palm Tree

Surely the date palm tree was among those created in the beginning to adorn the beautiful Garden of Eden. We recently learned of the discovery of a first century date palm seed from the land of Palestine. Before going into the significance of this, let us look at the history of the date palm tree. Its Hebrew word was *tamar*. Tamar was the wife of Er, the son of Judah. Er died, and as a widower she attracted Judah who fathered two sons by her. Tamar is also the name of a village around the Dead Sea. The Greek word for the date palm is *phoenix*, which we can identify with the city of palm trees in Arizona.

The palm tree is associated with peoples of ages past, as the very existence of man depends largely upon considered sacred in Arabia and Syria from the earliest ages. In Palestine, the palm leaf appears as an ornament upon pottery for nearly 2000 years before Christ. It was also used as a decoration of the temple among the Hebrews. It is a symbol of beauty (1 Kin. 6:29-35), and of the righteous man (Psa. 92:12-14). It has been used on Jewish coinage for centuries, and is currently on the Israeli's 10 shekel coin. The *honey* of the "land of milk and honey" has often been considered to be the date palm.

In Palestine today, the palm is much neglected with only a few groves along the coast. It once flourished on the Mount of Olives (Neh. 8:15). Jericho was once known as the city of palm trees, as it is mentioned when Moses was upon Mt. Nebo (Deu. 34:3). Two times reference is made to the city of palm trees (Jud. 1:16; 3:13), and Jericho is said to be that city (2 Chr. 28:15). The palm tree is associated with rejoicing (Lev. 23:40; Neh. 8:15). It is associated with victory, as palm branches were used to escort Jesus into Jerusalem (John 12:13). The victorious are pictured as standing before the Lamb in white robes and palms in their hands (Rev. 7:9). Josephus refers to the preciousness of palm trees in his historical works.

Loss of the Original Date Palm

It is said that with the coming of the Roman army during and around A.D. 70, that the palm tree was basically destroyed as the army plundered the land. Then, with Rome's further march during the Dark Ages to recover Palestine from the Moslems, the palm tree was virtually wiped out. The palm trees in Palestine today are said to be those that were imported from America in the 20th century by way of Asia.

Date Palm Seed Found

On August 1, 2005, CBS news gave the story of the lost date palm seed that we shall now relate to you. However, in June 2005, the story had already been made public in the *New York Times* in an article by

Steven Erlanger. The account is now recorded on the Internet. In A.D. 73, there were almost a thousand Jewish zealots holed up on Masada—a fortress that one of the Herods had built. These Jews died by their own hand rather than be captured by the Roman army. While there, they had food, among which was evidently date palms. In the 1970s, Masada was discovered and its ruins unearthed. On level 34 of the dig, several date palm seeds were found, obviously from the dates eaten by the Jews. These seeds were kept in a drawer until a few months ago. Dr. Sarah Sallon, while operating a project on Mid-eastern medicinal plants, asked for some of these seeds. She was given three. A snip of one of the seeds was taken for Radiocarbon dating, which showed it to be 1,990 years old, plus or minus 50 years—making the age of the seed to range from 35 B.C. to A.D. 65—just before the Roman invasion. She gave the seeds to Dr. Elaine Solowey, a botanist, who soaked the seeds and then planted them. Six weeks later, the ground began to crack and a small date palm from the first century seed began to come forth.

The first two leaves did not look good, but the third was an obvious date leaf, but the plant appeared as if it had a hard time getting out of the ground. Today, the date palm is about 12 inches in height. An incredible story! Our own investigation has uncovered no information to discredit this account.

The Parable

In thinking of the date palm, its loss, and its restoration from an old 2000 year old seed, clearly reminds us of the **church** of our Lord, that had its beginning in Jerusalem in the first century. Jesus built it (Mat. 16:18), and He is its head (Eph. 1:22f; Col. 1:18). Congregations then were known as "churches of Christ." But, again it was the **Romans** that contributed to its apostasy. The Roman emperor Constantine forced the early church to have a major conference in A.D. 325 to settle a dispute. Eventually the church was made the official religion of the land by the Romans. Then there was the development of the Roman Catholic Church, which had its first "pope" in A.D. 606 in the person of Boniface III. Then, it was after the dark ages that there arose such men as Martin Luther, who objected to the corruption in Rome, and set out to "reform" that body. This effort resulted in Luther being excommunicated and, in turn, the coming forth of the Lutheran Church in 1530. Luther begged his followers to **not** use his name but the name "Christian." Shortly after this, Henry VIII, king of England, wanted a separation from his wife Catherine (that he might marry Ann Bolyn), but the Pope refused to grant it. At this point, Henry separated the "church" in England along with its money, and established the Church of England, with him being its head. Then, through the teachings of John