

## 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,. It's Hebrew word was *tamar*. Tamar was the wife of Er, the son of Judah. Er died, and as a widow 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 a tree considered sacred in Arabia and Syria 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 Kings 6:29-35), and of the righteous man (Psalms 92:12-15). 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). Two times reference is made to the city of palm trees (Judges 1:16; 3:13), and Jericho is said to be that city (2 Chron. 28:15). 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 upon Masada—a fortress that one of the Herods had built. These Jews died by their own hands rather than be captured by the Roman army. While there, they had food, among which evidently date palms. In the 1970's, 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 in Masada. These seeds were kept in a drawer until a few years 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. 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 obvious a date palm leaf, but the plant appeared as if it had struggled getting out of the ground. It soon grew to about 12 inches in height. Search on the Internet shows a picture of the date palm tree in 2015 as being 3 feet tall, and a pollination took place with another tree, and the headline reads, "*Tree grown from 2,000-year-old seed has reproduced*" and is "*now a father.*" **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 (Matt. 16:18), and He is its head (Eph. 1:22-23; 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 was and is a combination of idolatry, Judaism and a little bit of Christianity. This church 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 instead of the pope. Then, with the teachings of John Calvin, the Presbyterian denomination came into existence shortly thereafter. The Methodist denomination later sprang from the Church in England. The door was open. Other denominations began to emerge, such as the Congregational Church in 1608, the Baptist in 1611. Many of the founders of these denominations later objected to the fruits of their labors, but their tracks could not be retraced.

John Calvin actually taught that baptism was not rightly performed in sprinkling or pouring, as well as did John Wesley and Martin Luther. Calvin and Wesley also believed that "Christian" was the only name the disciples were to wear, and that singing should be **without** the accompaniment of instrumental music as already being practiced in the Roman Catholic Church. These men are not our authorities, but they agree because the New Testament speaks so plainly on these matters that churches of Christ advocate today.

### **The Church Restored**

After these denominations came to America, they brought the divided spirit of religion with them. Many preachers around 1790 and afterward, agreed that the **only way** back to the true church was **not** through a reformation of Rome or any other religious group, but to a **return** to the teachings of the New Testament—the original **seed** of the kingdom, as Jesus said, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11)—the original **seed** of the kingdom, remembering that seed always reproduces after its kind. Just as the true date palm can be brought back through its **seed** that has been found, so can the church be restored. We can not reform the American palm and make **it** like the original of Palestine.

Neither could reformers reform Rome or the denominations that arose out of protesting the destructive work of the apostate church. **Only** by going to the seed could the original church be restored.

No date palm is “like” the original date palm of Israel by working on the seed. No different or altered seed will make it produce a church like the one which began on Pentecost in Acts 2. Remember the 12 spies that found a cluster of grapes in Palestine that was so large that it took two men to carry it? Even today, the “barren” soil of Palestine brought forth some of the best fruit on earth with the proper seed and watering. Today, if the same seed is sown, with the proper nurture it brings back one like the one that began in Jerusalem around A.D. 33.

The Bible is said to be *imperishable* seed. Peter said we are “born again, **not** of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:23). When Jesus gave the parable of the kingdom in Luke 8, He stated that the **seed** of that kingdom was the “word of God” (Luke 8:10-11). Jesus said that heaven and earth will pass away, but His **word** will “not pass away” (Matt. 24:35) and “the scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). He also said that in the last day we are going to be **judged** by that word (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12).

Now, if “corruptible seed” (such as the date palm of the first century), can be preserved, planted and bring forth “after it’s kind (Gen. 1:11), **even after 2000 years**, why it is difficult to believe that the “incorruptible seed” of the Word of God is **still** powerful today? One can be born again **of** that incorruptible seed (1 Pet. 1:23). As that seed (the Spirit’s Word) is planted into the good and honest hearts of men and women, it leads them through repentance and the waters of baptism where one is baptized **into** Christ to become God’s child. This is that birth of of the Spirit and the water described by Jesus in John 3:3-7.

We appeal to the world today to return with us **to** that precious seed, and allow God’s kingdom to thrive even today. Now, the religious “Christian” world argues today that it really doesn’t matter about “originality”, and that ALL “churches (35,000 of them) are really the one church of Christ. Would we reason that way regarding the palm tree, by saying that as long as we have **some** kind of palm trees, that they really make up the “one palm tree” mentioned in the Bible? They do NOT “all” make up that original palm tree, and the only way we can HAVE that original palm tree is to used the same seed that produced it centuries ago. Can you find in the scripture that ALL “denominations” (though different in name, origin, doctrine **really** are “one”, and have assurance that GOD is pleased with such division, when His word says we are to have “no divisions” among us (1 Cor. 1:10)?

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