

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

“But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: ‘Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.’ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”—Ephesians 5:13-16

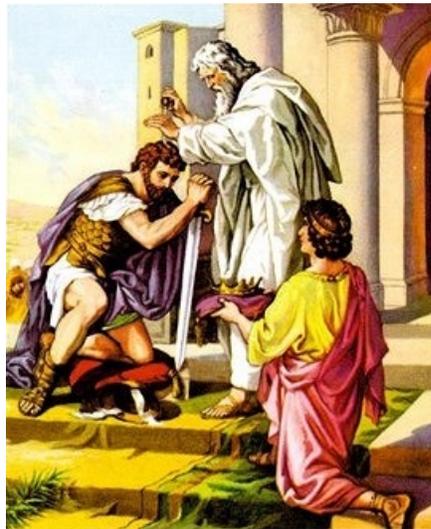
Volume 10 Number 2

February 2008

Lessons Learned From King David’s Family

By Graemme Marshall

Page 3



How can we understand God’s testimony of King David as “a man after My own heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22), when we see his failed family example?

Nehemiah: A Leader for All Time

By Darlene Petersen

Page 6



There is more than one kind of leadership. Some leaders are dictatorial, such as Nimrod, while others lead by example, such as Nehemiah.

Jacob and Joseph

By Robert Berendt

Page 7



God's calling and purpose is sure. Through trials and suffering, we learn to trust God and build character, just as the patriarchs in the Bible did. They trusted God to guide their lives and followed Him through all circumstances in life in order to gain their reward of eternal life.

The Good Samaritan

By Ken Allen

Page 10



"Love, love, love / Love is all you need." So goes a line from a popular song. But what kind of love do we need, and how should we show it?

King of the Oasis

By Kathleen Hoffart

Page 13



Dates were plentiful in the biblical times and grow well in many arid areas of the world. Yet one variety had completely disappeared. Could it be revived? What lessons can we learn from the date palm tree?

Letters to the Editor

Page 16

Virtual Christian Magazine Staff

Lorelei Nettles - Managing Editor
Lorelei Nettles - Issue Editor
Mike Bennett - Editors
Gayle Hoefker - Editors
Jada Howell - Editors

Patrick Kansa - Editors
David Meidinger - Editors
Suzanne Morgan - Editors
Amy Stephens - Editors
Debbie Werner - Editors
Jack Elliott - Reviewers
Eric Evans - Reviewers

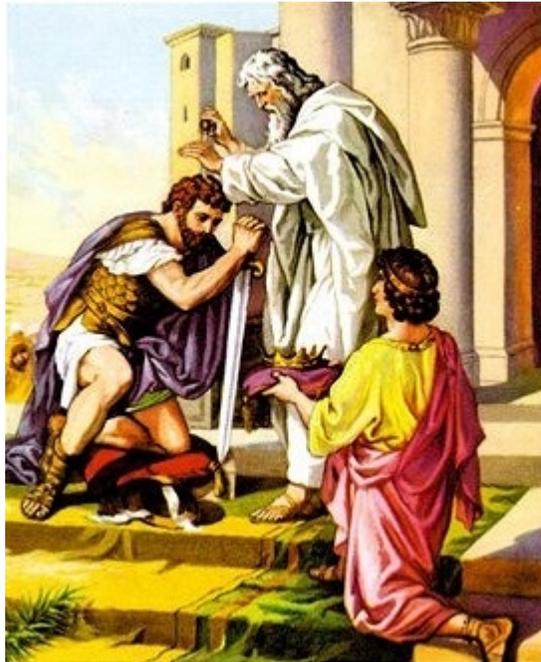
Don Henson - Reviewers
Don Hooser - Reviewers
Becky Bennett - Proofreader
Chris Rowland - Web Design

[Copyright 2008 United Church of God, an International Association](#)

Lessons Learned From King David's Family

By Graemme Marshall

How can we understand God's testimony of King David as "a man after My own heart, who will do all My will" (Acts 13:22), when we see his failed family example?

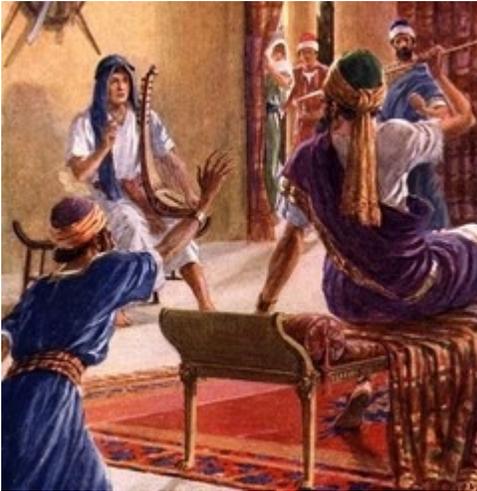


GOD HAD A DESTINY FOR THE SHEPHERD BOY chosen to be the king to bring expansion to the nation of Israel. The outcome of his life's walk with God will culminate in his becoming the future millennial king of Israel (Ezekiel 37:24). How do we put into focus his family relationships?

Culture

There must have been times as a new father that David rejoiced in a newborn son or daughter. Like us, he no doubt delighted in their childhood. But as a father who had a least eight wives plus "more" and some 20 children plus "other sons," he could not, as one man, emotionally supply what they all independently needed. Polygamy was not God's intent. The lesson could have been learned from the patriarchs or the recent example of Saul and his harem. Sadly, culture played its hand with David who, following Saul's precedent, took on the tragic chain of events leading to the breakup of his family.

Each generation seems bent on having to learn for themselves. The royal harem, with its palace intrigues, could only produce an unequal love from a father. Busy with expanding the kingdom, he may have had little time for children except his favorites, like Absalom. Regrettably, David's inner character did not rub off on the son he loved most.



Events came to a head in adulthood when his eldest son Amnon raped his beautiful half-sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13). Her brother, Absalom, was outraged, and hatred for his half-brother turned to a burning desire for revenge. If at this point David had punished Amnon, the royal family might not have split asunder so disastrously. But David, though “very angry” with Amnon (2 Samuel 13:21) apparently did nothing. From the sparse biblical record, he seemed unable to discipline his grown children. Is it evidence of a lack of early child training? Proverbial wisdom loudly proclaims, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

Because David failed to act with Amnon, Absalom took justice into his own hands by ordering his servants to murder his half-brother. Absalom then fled to his grandfather, the King of Geshur, and remained in exile. After five years, he was restored to the palace court.

David appeared unaware or unable to prevent this son’s ambition that led to a successful palace coup against him. Here a much-loved son would not return that love to his father. (Is this a type of the Heavenly Father’s love for a sinful, uncaring world?) When David later gave orders before engaging Absalom’s rebel army he said, “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom” (2 Samuel 18:5). But David’s commanders knew a rebellion could not be successfully crushed if its leader wasn’t executed.

On learning of the death of Absalom, David uttered his heartbroken cry of mourning and grief, perhaps mixed with self-reproach for his tragic inability to influence as a father: “O my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!” (2 Samuel 18:33). This depth of emotion is expressed later with Christ weeping over Jerusalem and in Paul’s wish to be accursed for his brethren’s sake. And is it not also true of us? If only we had the power to effect a change of course of errant children or people!

*God had a destiny
for the shepherd
boy chosen to be the
king to bring
expansion to the
nation of Israel.*

Passion and the “stripes of men”

Lovingly, God forgives sin, as He did David’s. But there is a price to pay—the law of cause and effect. To wayward but repentant children, God converts the effect of our sin into needy purifying. As He dealt with David, so He’ll deal with us. He will forgive, but He may also use the rod (paddle). He will restore us to favor, yet require us to drink the bitterness our sin brings. We learn through David’s family tragedies that, when we choose an action, we also choose its consequences.

Lovingly, God forgives sin, as He did David's. But there is a price to pay—the law of cause and effect.

David's bitter harvest started with Bathsheba's newborn child. An innocent baby died for the sin of its parents and a threefold prophecy unfolded as the prophet Nathan revealed God's judgment. Because David despised God's commands by murder and adultery, he was told, "the sword shall not depart from your house... I will raise up adversity against you... I will take your wives... For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel... the child also who is born to you shall surely die" (2 Samuel 12:10-14).

God was not going to allow David's pagan enemies to conclude His King could have an heir through murder and adultery. All was fulfilled. The "stripes of the children of men" (2 Samuel 7:14, King James Version) was God as Father disciplining His children for sin. God was chastening David, his chosen one, while David's own children are yet to face future repentance. For David, paying the price unfolded in his inability as a father to lovingly guide a polygamous household.

Even in death, there is failure

The account of David's dying doesn't illustrate a loving devoted family hovering around his bedside. Instead, cold-hearted political forces were at work. Adonijah, David's oldest son, is more concerned about being the next king than about his dying father. He initiates a crowning of himself supported by Joab, the military commander, and Abiathar, the priest. How could a son be so uncaring, so openly ambitious? Perhaps it's not too unlike family squabbles today over inheritance before on has even died!

There is a poignant bracketed thought. His father had not rebuked him at anytime saying, "Why have you done so?" (1 Kings 1:6). Proverbial wisdom leaps to mind again with, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod [paddle] of correction will drive it far from him" (Proverbs 22:15). And "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod [paddle], he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod [paddle], and deliver his soul from hell" (Proverbs 23:13-14).

While David's family life was unsuccessful, he will be the king of Israel in the Millennium—and He truly was a man after God's own heart.

It leaves us with sobering thoughts about the importance of early childhood training. "The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Proverbs 29:15), and "Correct your son, and he will give you rest; yes, he will give delight to your soul" (verse 17).

Like many today, David didn't seem to get much rest from his children during his lifetime. While David's family life was unsuccessful, he will be the king of Israel in the Millennium—and He truly was a man after God's own heart. Despite our best efforts, increased child and family knowledge, we may also be thwarted by culture, passion and "the stripes of men" (2 Samuel 7:14).

In the world to come, David will find rest and delight in all his children. And we, too, like him, will share in that marvelous parental delight. Until Christ returns, may we learn the lessons taught through the lives of King David and others to nurture our own healthy family relationships.

Nehemiah: A Leader for All Time

By Darlene Petersen

There is more than one kind of leadership. Some leaders are dictatorial, such as Nimrod, while others lead by example, such as Nehemiah.



NEHEMIAH'S LIFE AND PRINCIPLES show us what a Christian needs to be a good leader, especially when we lead by example. Nehemiah had godly character traits that made him an outstanding leader.

Nehemiah was loyal to the king and to his fellow Jews, but above all, he was loyal to God. He fasted and prayed in preparation to do God's work (Nehemiah 1:3-4). He did this in order to serve his fellow Jews and to follow God's will instead of his own. He proved that to be loyal is to be constant and faithful in any obligation, implying trust and confidence.

He led by example and did not expect others to do what he would not have done himself (2:17-18; 4:21). It seems Nehemiah was hauling stones himself! How encouraging it must have been for the people to see this high-ranking official working so hard to defend the city.

In Nehemiah 4:21, Nehemiah uses the word "we" instead of "you." He was governor, but he still got his hands dirty. Our approach to the work of God should be the same.

Nehemiah was faced with opposition that was trying to stop him from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. He risked his life for others and for the cause (4:19-20). He was very bold and courageous, and he knew God's will. He simply prayed, then went to work and trusted God to protect him (6:8-9, 16).

In Nehemiah 6:10-11, Nehemiah was tempted to hide in the temple, for fear he might be assassinated, but he refused to sin by entering the temple in this manner. By showing fear in the face of danger and running away at such a crucial time, Nehemiah's actions would have

Nehemiah was loyal to the king and to his fellow Jews, but above all, he was loyal to God. He fasted and prayed in preparation to do God's work.

disheartened those who had been inspired by his valor. We need to be just as bold in our Christian lives so we can resist those who would frustrate the purpose of God and His Church.

He led by example and did not expect others to do what he would not have done himself.

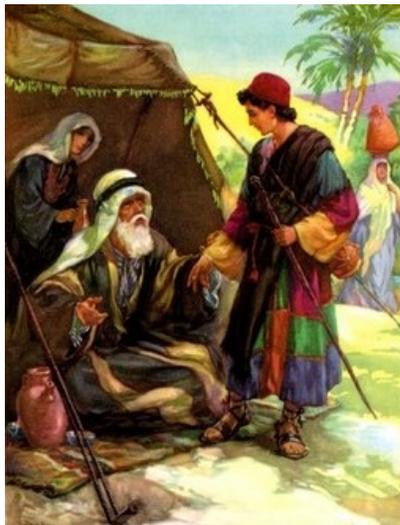
Nehemiah was a generous man. He was not in it for personal gain. There was a famine that ravished the land, and many had gone into debt to feed their families. Their homes were taken away and their children were sold into slavery (5:9-10). Nehemiah lent them money and grain and paid a great portion of these expenses out of his own pocket (5:17). He also corrected those who took advantage of the situation (5:10).

Nehemiah feared God. He turned his attention to rebuilding the spiritual foundation. He publicly subjected himself to God's laws and set a high standard for others to follow. He restored tithing, the Sabbath and Holy Days, and he refrained from mingling with pagan nations (8:1-18). In Nehemiah 10:1, he was the first to sign an agreement to walk in God's laws. As a result of his leadership, the rebuilding of the wall was completed in less than two months. Nehemiah knew when to exercise his authority because he knew and understood God's will and was loyal to it. Whether we are leaders or not, we, too, need these character traits to be balanced Christians.

Jacob and Joseph

By Robert Berendt

God's calling and purpose is sure. Through trials and suffering, we learn to trust God and build character, just as the patriarchs in the Bible did. They trusted God to guide their lives and followed Him through all circumstances in life in order to gain their reward of eternal life.



THERE ARE SOME GREAT AND WONDERFUL stories in Scripture—but perhaps none more moving than the story of Jacob and Joseph. We read these marvelous tales and reread them to learn the many lessons they yield. Almost all who read the stories miss some fragment of great truth. That is the beauty of the Holy Scriptures, you cannot glean everything from them in just

one reading—actually a lifetime of reading and study will show a person that there is more to learn.

In Genesis 37:29-35 we read that Joseph was “dead,” as far as Jacob was concerned. Jacob mourned the death of his son for the next 16 years. Every parent who has lost or almost lost a child can immediately understand the agony and unending sorrow Jacob wrestled with during those years.

Sorrow and suffering

The saga continues in Scripture. In Genesis 44:16-22, we see the 10 brothers of Joseph (who had sold him into slavery) were still plagued and affected by what they had done. As a result, they and their father had also become overanxious about Benjamin (Joseph’s only full brother). Joseph, in the meantime, was also missing his family and his father, Jacob, most of all. As he reveals his identity in Genesis 45:3, Joseph’s first question is about Jacob his father. “Then Joseph said unto his brothers, ‘I am Joseph; does my father still live?’”

This is also the purpose for the sufferings of Jesus Christ. God allowed them for your sake and mine.

It is a great exercise in thought to visualize God’s position in all of these events. God heard Jacob’s anguished cry for years in his prayers. The sorrow and weight carried by the brothers is also clear. Joseph, in the meantime, was also in prayer to God in all of his trials. Every night God heard Jacob’s lament and pain. God allowed him to suffer and believe that Joseph was dead for about 16 years.

All of the family suffered for this length of time. Joseph eventually had a little more encouragement from God through his dreams and the unfolding of events. He also knew his father and brothers were alive when he was sold into slavery. The acts of his brothers, though, would weigh heavily on him for years. That was, without doubt, one of the reasons Joseph handled their first appearance before him with care. He needed to know how they now felt.

By the time Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt, Joseph knew the reason God had let him be sold into slavery and reassured his brothers (Genesis 45:5). Like all people with whom God has concerned Himself, Joseph had trials and tests of faith and trust.



Jacob must have wondered for years why God had (he thought) let Joseph die. Why was Joseph not saved or rescued by God? These are questions many people would have in those circumstances. Jacob agonized, but he did not curse God. The reason God allowed the events was so Israel could live. “God sent me before you to preserve life” (verse 5). God saved the lives of Jacob’s family through Joseph. There were eternal lessons to be learned in the process. Though painful, their purpose and goal were so very great that there was nothing left to be said. They could only praise and glorify God.

This is also the purpose for the sufferings of Jesus Christ. God allowed them for your sake and mine (John 3:16-17). He suffered so we could have life everlasting (Luke 18:28-30).

Our calling and purpose

The people of God have a similar calling and purpose. They, too, suffer in Satan's world while trying to live a godly life. Their purpose is to save this world and give life to it. In Matthew 24:22, Jesus states because there are people who follow Him and willingly suffer to obey God, life will be saved on this earth. The time of greatest danger lies immediately ahead of us all. Mankind will be looking for a Helper and Redeemer. God is preparing a people for the return of Jesus Christ in the near future. This world is standing on the brink of disaster and death without recognizing the "Joseph" that is waiting in the wings.

It is impossible for God to be even the least bit negligent, unkind or lacking in love for His people. He is totally in charge and loves the people He created and hates evil. God is in the process of creating a people for the future. (To learn more, read our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?*) God is refining and perfecting people today just as He did in Jacob and Joseph's time (Daniel 11:35).

Suffering with a good attitude builds character. God's intention is that righteous character be built in His people.

God allowed Jesus to be "perfected" by what He suffered (Hebrews 5:5-10, 14). We too, must understand the awesome wisdom of God in allowing us to suffer. The process of preparation and refinement belongs to God. He is the Potter; we are the clay (Romans 9:21).

Suffering builds character—both good and bad. God's intention is that righteous character be built in His people. Just as Joseph grew in stature and wisdom through what he suffered, even so, we, too, must endure and continue to grow to be more like God. Endurance, patience, care for others, strength, resilience, toughness, perseverance—all are developed through what we experience in the hard knocks of life. Jacob and Joseph experienced the fulfilled promises and purpose God had in mind. Jesus, too, knew the purpose of His suffering and accepted it (Luke 22:42).

We have a life to live and a life to give. It is a challenge, and there is a purpose and goal. As the heroes and heroines who went before us, we, too, need to learn to trust God to do His part as we live our lives and accept our part. God is the author and finisher of our faith and of our lives (Hebrews 12:2).

The Good Samaritan

By Ken Allen

“Love, love, love / Love is all you need.” So goes a line from a popular song. But what kind of love do we need, and how should we show it?



IN 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3 WE READ: “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing” (American Standard Version).

The apostle Paul here tests our love quotient on three levels:

- Does your love only speak eloquently without being ratified by deeds?
- Is your love purely an intellectual concept?
- Is it merely a photo opportunity or a show to get applause?

News-making acts of philanthropy and self-sacrifice are merely that (news-making), if they are done from ulterior motives and not from genuine love. As the saying goes, “You can give without loving, but you can’t love without giving.”

Take a fresh look at the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). The parable demonstrates the principle of true godly, unconditional love. It also teaches us that God is more impressed with our living the law of love than merely believing or preaching it. The Gospels record two men coming to Christ on different occasions to inquire of Him the way to eternal life. One was a rich, young man (Matthew 19:16-22) and the other was a legal expert (Luke 10:25-29).

What must I do?

When we compare both passages, we see some startling similarities and differences. The first thing we notice is that both men had the same question: “What must I do to gain eternal life?” But

while the young man genuinely wanted to know the answer, the lawyer was just trying to test or try Jesus.

The second thing we see is that Christ showed there is only one way and that was to *keep God's commandments!* (See Matthew 19:17.) Notice in Luke 10:26, Jesus answered the fool according to his folly by essentially saying: "You are the legal expert. What's your interpretation of the law?" The lawyer correctly summarized the law as love toward God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and love for your neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). The young man, like many elusive Christians today, wanted to know which of the Ten Commandments were relevant for him to keep.

Christ magnified the law by using a parable to explain who is a neighbor and how we should show love to our neighbor.

A third point to note is that while the young man realized there was a need to do more than just keep the commandments, the lawyer sought to justify or acquit himself from personal responsibility to his fellow man. He did this by attempting to engage Christ in semantics on the word "neighbor" (Luke 10:29). Jesus went on to explain in Matthew 19:21 two extra steps required to gain eternal life:

1. Self-sacrifice ("sell what you have and give to the poor").
2. Self-denial and commitment ("come follow Me"). Mark, in his account, adds: "Take up the cross, and follow Me" (Mark 10:21).

This is the same commitment we are called to make when we decide to follow Christ (Luke 14:26-27, 33).

At the end of this discussion, we see both men fail the test of true discipleship. The rich, young man failed because he was too materialistic. His priority was misplaced on his wealth. The legal expert failed because he was legalistic. He preached the word but did not practice it. That is hypocrisy.

Who is my neighbor?

In the concluding part of the story in Luke 10:30-37; Christ followed up on the legal expert's question about who was defined as his neighbor. Christ magnified the law by using a parable to explain who is a neighbor and how we should show love to our neighbor. In this familiar story a man is robbed, beaten and left for dead on the roadside. A priest passed by and avoided him by crossing the street and continuing on his way on the other side. A Levite came by, looked curiously and then walked right on by too. But a Samaritan came by, picked up the unfortunate crime victim, took him to a hotel and took care of him.



This story should make us ask ourselves some soul-searching questions. Am I like the priest, (who completely avoided the victim) when I see someone in difficulty? His was an apathetic attitude of noninvolvement. Perhaps he was too busy, concerned with what he viewed to be more important matters. Maybe he just considered himself too good to get his hands dirty with the blood of a wounded stranger.



The Levite was a typical curiosity-seeker. He just wanted to see who or what was suffering but had no interest in helping. His behavior is so typical of many motorists on our highways who are more intrigued with looking at a mangled car in a ditch than they are in stopping to see if or how they can help the unfortunate fellow motorist.

Fortunately, not everyone is like this. Jesus used a most unlikely character, a Samaritan, as the one who showed what it is to be a good neighbor and to love. People from whom we expect the least oftentimes give the most. Those who have been victimized and later shown compassion are usually more apt to identify with others who are suffering.

The Jews despised the Samaritans. Yet it was this despised and rejected Samaritan who came to the rescue of the crime victim.

Show love in deed

In telling the parable of this humble Samaritan, Jesus preached the greatest sermon ever on how to love your neighbor by practicing compassion toward a stranger in need.

He practiced love firsthand. He didn't love at a distance or through an agency. He took personal responsibility for this victim in need. He went the extra mile by not only caring for him overnight in the inn, but also making arrangements to pay any additional expenses incurred for his extended care. That is true godly, unconditional love and compassion in action!

Jesus preached the greatest sermon ever on how to love your neighbor by practicing compassion toward a stranger in need.

We have all heard stories of good Samaritans. We probably even know people who have risked life and limb to help others in distress. We may have even been good Samaritans ourselves at one time or another. Still, there are three important lessons we can learn from good Samaritan situations:

- Don't refuse to help when you are able (Proverbs 3:27).
- Never assume someone else will do it. Take personal responsibility.
- You may suffer for doing well, but it is truly worth it (1 Peter 3:17; Matthew 5:10).

Next time you have an opportunity to serve someone in need (a motorist in distress on the highway, a person under a cloud of depression, a friend in a financial bind, a single parent being overwhelmed by a rebellious child, a stressed-out coworker...) what will your reaction be? Will you be the religious law-*speaking* type or the proactive law-*living* type?

The message of the parable is very clear: **Being a good neighbor and showing love by doing, are more honorable than merely speaking about love.** Franklin D. Roosevelt said in his inaugural address: "In the field of world policy, I would dedicate this nation [the United States of America] to the policy of a good neighbor." Jesus' instruction to us is simple, yet profound: **"Go and do likewise!"**

King of the Oasis

By Kathleen Hoffart

Dates were plentiful in the biblical times and grow well in many arid areas of the world. Yet one variety had completely disappeared. Could it be revived? What lessons can we learn from the date palm tree?



THE MIDDLE EAST WAITS ANXIOUSLY in hope that a new palm tree sapling called “Methuselah” may renew life to the famous Date Palm Grove that once flourished in ancient Israel during King Solomon’s rule.

According to Haaretz.com, Dr. Elaine Soloway of Kibbutz Ketura in Israel will soon know if the sapling is male or female. The odds are 50-50, but if it is a female it will become possible in two or three years to taste a date that, though once known widely for succulence and sweetness, disappeared from Judea by the time of the crusaders

The date palms now growing in the region are offshoots of plants imported from California in the 1950s and 1960s, varieties native to Iraq and North Africa.

Dr. Soloway’s sapling grew from a date pit that had been tossed into a clay jar, forgotten and then discovered two millennia later when Masada was excavated in the 1970s (<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/826167.html>).

A long history

At one time groves of date palms stretched in a 7-mile wide swath along the Jordan River from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. Dates grown in the region were so much a part of the culture of Judea that the Romans minted a coin depicting a palm tree, with the words “Judæa Capta” (Judæa captured).

When Jesus came into Jerusalem before His final Passover, the crowds took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him (John 12:13).

A thousand years before that palm trees were carved on the walls and the doors of the temple Solomon built (1 Kings 6:29, 32).

The Psalmist wrote that the righteous would flourish like a palm tree (Psalm 92:12).

Further back in time, Deborah would sit under “the palm tree of Deborah” when the children of Israel came to her for judgment (Judges 4:5).

From his final vantage point of Mt. Nebo above the Promised Land, Moses looked over to the plain of Jericho, the city of palm trees (Deuteronomy 34:3).

“Tamar,” the Hebrew word for date palm, is a name given to daughters in both ancient and modern-day Israel.

Considered the “king of the oasis,” there are some 600 varieties of dates. Approximately 240 to 360 different varieties of dates grow in Saudi Arabia. There are reputed to be over 350 varieties in Basra, Iraq, alone. The quality of water, soil type and local growing techniques affect the taste of the different varieties.

“Feet in water, heads in the fires”

Dates require irrigation and fertilization. Hand pollination of the date flowers is done as winter moves into spring. Pruning, which is essential to produce a large, high-quality date is done during the spring. Harvest starts in September and ends in November.

The date pit can lay dormant for years before it germinates, as it waits for favorable conditions. Traditionally, offshoots from the base of the date palm were planted, but now tiny cuttings are taken from the heart of the palm. It takes about 20 to 21 months for this growth bud to develop into a seedling that can be planted outside. The ideal growing condition for the date is “with their feet in water and their heads in the fires of the heavens,” as the Arabs put it. Their roots reach deep within the earth for the life sustaining water.

The date palm begins producing at around seven years of age and continues producing for at least another 75 years. Though it may grow to be over 100 feet tall, it is usually cut to a height of about 50 feet to make harvesting of the date clusters easier. Each tree can produce up to around 350 pounds of dates.

A remarkable food

For years Saudi Arabia has worked with the World Food Program (WFP) in a joint undertaking with the United Nations affiliated Food and Agricultural Organization to provide food for drought

“Tamar,” the Hebrew word for date palm, is a name given to daughters in both ancient and modern-day Israel.



ravaged nations in Africa. The Saudis built a plant in the al-Hasa Oasis to process the dates, which is the bulk of Saudi Arabia's contribution to the WFP.



Dates are also known as the cake of the poor—they are perhaps the ideal food for hungry refugees. Two pounds of dates provide almost 3,000 calories. Dates have a high nutritional value and will keep indefinitely when dried, and their 75 to 80 percent sugar content will inhibit the growth of most bacteria. Recent studies have shown the date to be the richest source of antioxidants.

Pregnant or nursing women eat dates to make sure they receive adequate nutrition and energy. The tradition of mothers in Arabia using dry, chewy dates to wean their infants is a tradition that is slowly dying. Chewing on the dates would pacify the infants, strengthen their gums, and take their minds off the pain of teething.

Nothing the date palm produces is ever wasted. The pits of the dates are soaked and fed to animals when grazing is scarce. The wood of the trunk is used for building houses and dhows. The trunk fiber is used to make ropes, palm fronds are used for thatching, baskets and other household items, and any unused part of the date palm is used for fuel or fertilizer.

*Two pounds of
dates provide
almost 3,000
calories.*

Within Bedouin culture, date palms are unguarded until it is time for harvesting. The Bedouin follow the principle of Deuteronomy 23:24-25. A hungry traveler may eat some of the dates as long as he leaves the pits and his tribal sign alongside the trunk of the date palm. But should anyone be caught stealing dates for economic gain the tribal judges will heavily fine him.

Following the example of their ancestor Abraham (Genesis 18:1-8), the Bedouin also have a rich tradition of hospitality. Three small cups of coffee and dates are the traditional Bedouin offerings to a visitor.

Recent studies show that dates are the richest source of antioxidants. Coffee came in second.

Truly a blessing from God, the date palm is a much appreciated mainstay of Middle Eastern culture.

Letters to the Editor

Vol. 10 No. 1—Best ever!

Thank you so much for this issue of VCM, I thought it was the best one ever!

Keep up the great work!

— T.M.

Women: The Young, the Old and the Blessed

I enjoyed this article.

— D.G.

Aging

Thank you for all the articles in the last two months of the *Virtual Christian Magazine*. Aging information is a comfort!

— D. and J. Schneider

“The Big Cover Up”

The link referenced from this page seems not to work. Keep up the good work.

— Steve

Thanks for the note. That page was done in 2001 before our site redesign, and the links were out-of-date. We have updated them. Thanks!

I think this is great to provide a link from the *This Is the Way* e-mail to the *Virtual Christian Magazine*.

— Karen Halvorsen

How low can humankind get? Although the creature was already dead, surely they could have moved it from the road and at least covered it with leaves. Do we stop to think what becomes of the calf, if the said victim was a doe?

How the good Lord must despair of how we treat the animals in our supposed care. Talk about “heaping up coals”!

Come quickly Lord—Amen!

— Susy from England

[“Peanuts and Perfume”](#)

Your article [“Peanuts and Perfume”](#) in *Virtual Christian Magazine* is very well written. Even though peanuts were mentioned in the beginning, I wished it had been stated more clearly how detrimental or even fatal the peanut allergy can be. Just like perfumes, just the smell of peanuts, or the fact that someone had touched peanuts themselves and then touched the peanut allergy person, could be fatal. This I know from firsthand experience, having a child with a severe peanut allergy. Thank you for listening, and thank you for the article.

[What Makes a Woman Beautiful?](#)

That was a very well put article. However, I wish it was longer. I found myself reading and gained the cliffhanger feeling. Needless to say, keep up the good work, and may God’s blessing be with you forever.

[Thoughts for Thanksgiving](#)

In the paragraph above the heading “A Short List of Blessings” there is a saying with a wrong word. “Familiarity breeds contempt,” goes the old saw. It should be “saying.” Again, I want to thank all who are a part of *Virtual Christian Magazine* for the great spiritual food you are making available to all of us. Keep up the good work.

— L.E.

Actually, “saw” is a word that means saying, maxim or proverb. So this was not an error. But thanks for your careful reading!

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity