

G P S

For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

The Date Palm Tree

Thomas à Kempis wrote, “Vanity it is, to wish to live long, and to be careless to live well.” The Bible is full of illustrations about older age that encourage us in our later years. One of those is the Psalmist’s picture of the palm and cedar trees in Psalm 92:12-15.

12 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. 13 Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They shall bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, 15 to declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

The palm trees are an interesting landmark in biblical history. We see them in the oases of Elim and Jericho, on the walls of Solomon’s and Ezekiel’s temples, and its leaves used in the feast of tabernacles and at the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The palm tree was actually a date palm that produced large clusters of dates each season. It was used, and is still used, throughout Israel for food, shade, material, fodder for camels, and even various drinks. The text describes seven unique features that the psalmist applies to older age.

It flourishes (12). The date palm lived from 150 to 200 years unlike the grass which comes and goes in a day (see vs. 7). In 2005, 2000-year-old date palm seeds were excavated at Masada and replanted. By 2007 one male seed had grown three feet tall. The scientist reported, “It’s a boy!” and named it Methuselah. Even Methuselah didn’t flourish for 2000 years.

It grows (12). Like the cedar, the date palm grows about 80 feet straight up and blossoms with huge arching leaves and clusters of dates. The psalmist must have been thinking of his forbears whose white hair is their crown and glory.

It is planted (13). “Those who are planted in the house of the Lord.” To grow and flourish in God’s house all of our lives is a blessing not only to ourselves but to all our posterity. The faithfulness of those years will be remembered by coming generations.

It flourishes (13). “In the courts of our God.” These trees provided shade in courtyards and also in the temple area. Their tap root was extremely long and deep and brought life and health to the house. “Our fathers have told us what deeds You did in days of old” (Psa. 44:1).

It bears fruit (14). “In old age.” Not only did these trees live 200 years, they bore large clusters of dates weighing hundreds of pounds every year until they died. The huge leaves that they shed were used for baskets, clothing, and other house-hold purposes. “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children” (Prov. 13:22).

It is fresh and flourishing (14). “Flourishing” could be translated “green.” The bark of the date palm tree was full of sap used to make wax, resin, oil, and sometimes a very potent drink. Even the camels could eat of the bark. Fibrous strips from the trunk were braided into rope and the huge leaves into baskets.

It declares the Lord (15). He is “upright” and “my rock” and there is “no unrighteousness in Him.” Just the physical presence of this stately tree reminded the psalmist and, no doubt, any who passed by in their caravans, of God’s glory.

The date palm tree is a beautiful biblical picture of the value of older age. “The silver-haired head is a crown of glory, if it is found in the way of righteousness” (Prov. 16:31).

Book Review

Parenting Essentials, by Andreas & Margaret Köstenberger

I have recommended Köstenberger's larger book, *God, Marriage and Family* already. He and his wife Margaret, together, have also written a few books on the family. If I had to recommend a smaller, more readable book to fathers and mothers, I would recommend this one. It is built around three "R"s, Realistic (for the parent, child, and world), Relational (relating to God and one another), and Responsible (for character, education, and mission). The authors are strong on the traditional family, discipline, Christian education—especially home schooling, and viewing the home as our most important mission field. Though a respected theologian, author, and seminary professor, Köstenberger is a very practical, down-to-earth father. He relates this story about leading his son to Christ. "He was barely four years old, and he and I were in worship. He told me he needed to leave (for a restroom break), so I went with him. While there, he took the opportunity to ask me a spiritual question. One thing led to another, and by the time we left the bathroom, I had led him to a saving knowledge of Christ!" I think that is a wonderful story that needs to be repeated often.

"GPS" Groups

In May we met for our second GPS meeting at our church. The subject this month was leading children to Christ. For grandparents, this is something that we have all been through and are now watching our children presenting the gospel to their children. We went over the basics (the "irreducible minimum") of what it takes to understand the gospel. It was easy to relate some of the warnings and also the blessings of children coming to Christ at an early age. There is obviously an "age of accountability," or a time when a child understands, is convicted of sin, and is ready and willing to receive Christ. This varies from child to child and from situation to situation. Children that have grown up in a Christian family and a good church, understand the gospel message quickly and early. Testimonies of children being saved was also a blessing during our meeting.

Statistics

Last month a report was published by the Cultural Research Center of Arizona Christian University. George Barna is the Director of Research. Their report was the American Worldview Inventory 2022. The first headline I saw about the report was titled, "Poll Shocker: You won't believe how many pastors actually have a biblical worldview." Following that up I found Barna's own article. He writes, "A new nationwide survey among a representative sample of America's Christian pastors shows that a large majority of those pastors do not possess a biblical worldview. In fact, just slightly more than a third (37%) have a biblical worldview and the majority—62%—possess a hybrid worldview known as Syncretism." The report also listed associate pastors at only 28%, teaching pastors at 13%, youth pastors at 12%, and executive pastors at 4%. No doubt this study was done from a broad field, but at least it was done by evangelicals. This research can be found at [ArizonaResearch.edu/culturalresearchcenter/research](https://arizonaResearch.edu/culturalresearchcenter/research). Barna's article at https://www.arizonachristian.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/AWVI2022_Release05_Digital.pdf

Lessons on Prayer

As I grow older I realize the advantage of prayer in new ways. First because I have experienced answered prayer many times in my life. Second because I am acutely aware that I cannot do as many things as I used to do and I find myself going to God instead. Third because I have a greater trust now in God's providence than in my wisdom. And fourth because I see eternity clearer and know that an eternal perspective on things is much more important than earthly priorities.

Somewhere C.S. Lewis said that God has given man the "dignity of causality" in two ways: we can do things and we can ask God to do things. Though the things we do are sometimes amazing, they cannot compare to what God can do. Unfortunately, however, we spend much more time doing things ourselves than asking God to do them. In addition I would add, when we do get around to asking God to do things, our requests are seldom aligned with His will (Jas. 4:1-3; 1 John 5:14). But, oh, what power there is in prayer properly made!