

Because each scroll is identical, if one turns up there is no means of identifying where it came from. The computer has come to the rescue. Although all scrolls look identical there are minute variations in the writing not detectable

to the naked eye. A powerful scanner and sophisticated software enable the characteristics of each scroll to be stored on a database so that if it is stolen its particular characteristics can be compared against any that turn

up. As a result, the insurance premium for a registered scroll is a third of the premium for an unregistered one.

Source: "Stolen Torah sleuths", Mitch Ginsburg, *Jerusalem Report*, 19 Mar. 2007.

A botanical 'resurrection'

David Burges

THE DATE PALM is one of the characteristic trees of the Middle East, including Israel, and in Biblical times was grown extensively in the Land. Thick forests of palms grew in the Jordan Valley, and Jericho was known as "the city of palm trees" (Deut. 34:3). The botanical name *Phoenix dactylifera* derives from *phoinix*, the Greek name for the tree (the Hebrew name is *tamar*) and probably from its association with Phoenicia, the Biblical territory of Tyre and Sidon.

The Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder, who lived in the first century A.D., wrote that Judea's dates were renowned for their succulence and sweetness. In fact the palm was identified so closely with Judea that the Emperor Vespasian celebrated the conquest of A.D. 70 by minting the 'Judæa Capta', a bronze coin depicting the Jewish state as a weeping woman beneath a date palm.

Following the exclusion of Jews from the Land, the Judean date palms also died out. Palm trees grown in modern Israel were imported from California and derive from a strain originating in Iraq.

History brought back to life

Amazingly, in recent experiments by the Arava Research Institute, located at Kibbutz Ketura in Israel, an ancient seed of a Judean palm has been germinated and a date palm seedling produced. The seeds were recovered from a jar during the excavations of Masada by archaeologist Ehud Netzer in the 1970s and were then kept in store. Radiocarbon dating has confirmed that the seeds are around 2,000 years old, making this the oldest tree seed to have been successfully germinated. They were presumably discarded by members of the band of Jewish rebels who held out against the

Roman legions for three years before committing mass suicide in A.D. 73.

The researcher, Dr Elaine Soloway, soaked the seed in warm water, and then added gibberellic acid, a potent growth hormone used to induce



Date palms at Neot Kedumim, Israel.

(Picture: Tony Benson)

germination in reluctant seeds. Next, she added a special rooting hormone to woody plants and an enzyme-rich fertilizer to supplement the natural food inside it. She then planted it in sterile potting soil on Tu Bishvat, the Jewish festival of trees, which in 2005 fell on 25 January. After about five weeks the seed cracked open, the first leaves appeared two weeks later, and roots after a few months.

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1. Ofri Ilani, "2,000-year-old date seed grows in Arava", *Nature*, 17 Feb. 2007.

Scientists have removed one of the leaves for DNA testing so that the ancient palm can be compared with modern strains, and they now have to wait until the seedling is five years old to discover whether the plant is male or female. Only female plants bear fruit. Scientists hope that the unique seedling will eventually yield vital clues to the medicinal properties which were attributed to the fruit of the Judean date tree in Biblical times.

A modern parable

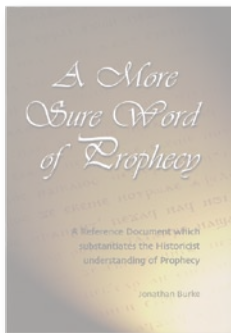
The astonishing revival of the ancient Judean date palm after nearly 2,000 years stands as a striking allegory of the national resurrection of Israel. The

palm is one of the characteristic trees of the Land (Joel 1:12), and its representation was specified for the decoration of the House of God (1 Kgs. 6:29ff.; Ezek. 40:16ff.). Its branches likewise were to be used for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:40) and were used to greet the Lord Jesus at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Jno. 12:13; cf. Mt. 21:8).

A scientific 'miracle' in which a 2,000-year-old date seed has sprung to life aptly symbolises the greater miracle soon to come, in which the nation of Israel will again bear fruit to God, and when the true Messiah will come again and be greeted by his people bearing branches of palm trees.

Our prophetic heritage

John Nicholls



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THE 'CONTINUOUS historic' interpretation of the Book of Revelation was for a long time the only one held in Christadelphian literature, the basis being *Eureka* and *Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse*. Today other interpretations have been offered, usually 'Futurist' and generally fairly short in length. The arguments for and against have been well aired, particularly in Brother Graham Pearce's *Revelation: Which Interpretation?*

The booklet under review, written by Brother Jonathan Burke from Australia, adopts a different approach to supporting the Continuous Historic view. Our brother has accessed the writings of students of the Apocalypse and Daniel from

as far back as the first century A.D. in order to compare how they interpreted the books and understood the symbols. He has consulted over 200 sources and perused the comments of over 400 writers to produce his book, which he says "is a highly compressed edition of a far larger work". It contains only about a fifth of his material, and in order to keep his book to a reasonable size he has not included a bibliography.

When the reviewer read this, he was somewhat disappointed, as a work of this nature demands that original sources are quoted, but Brother Burke explains that to have done this would have increased the size of the book by twenty-five per cent. A website is given, however, from which it is possible to download a large number of the books which have been the research sources for his work.

Daniel and 2 Thessalonians

The booklet itself is organised into sections based on particular prophecies. The first is Nebuchadnezzar's image dream, and there is a table with a list of expositors, the date of their exposition and how they interpreted the parts of the image: the head, chest, belly and thighs, etc. As Daniel is in the Old Testament, Jewish scholars are included, amongst them Josephus in the first century A.D. Selected quotations are then made from the sources used. For example, Irenaeus (A.D. 180), an early church father, says of the image: "The ten toes, therefore, are these ten kings, among whom the kingdom shall be partitioned, of whom some