

Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, Inc.

P.O. BOX 21, PALM SPRINGS, CA 92263-0021

TREES

By Ralph Woodrow

I think that I shall never see

A poem lovely as a tree....

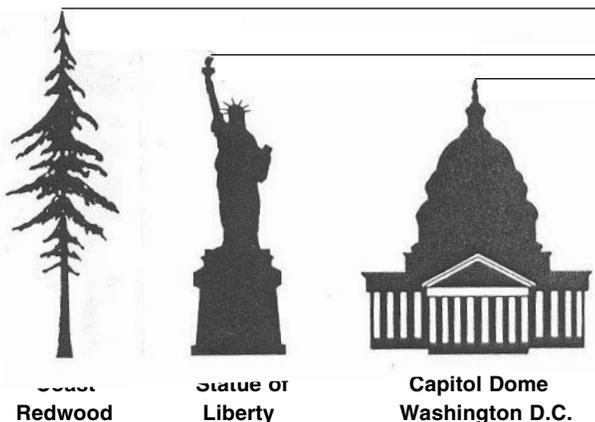
Poems are made by fools like me,

But only GOD can make a tree.

—Alfred Joyce Kilmer (1886–1918).

The *largest* tree in the world, figured by overall volume, is The General Sherman Tree, located in Sequoia National Park (California). It has been my privilege on a number of occasions to visit the site of this massive tree. It is awesome! With a trunk circumference at ground level of 102.6 feet, it is wider than some city streets. Its height, at 274.9 feet, is comparable to a 26-story building!

Taller still, though not as large overall, is another form of Sequoia: The Coast Redwood. Located in Redwood National Park (California), it is believed to be the *tallest* tree in the world: 379.1 feet!



Redwood

Statue of Liberty

Capitol Dome Washington D.C.

It is interesting that the name for Sequoia trees comes from Sequoyah, an Indian Chief who invented the Cherokee alphabet. Born in Tennessee in 1776, he also lived in the areas that are now called Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Ironically, he never

saw the giant California trees that would later be named in his honor!

The *oldest* known tree in the world, nicknamed “Methuselah” (cf. Genesis 5:27), is located in the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest of the White Mountains near Bishop (California). It is 4,700 years old, measured by annual ring count from a small core sample.

In some parts of the country, trees grow nearly everywhere. Clearings are usually where trees have been cut down. Other parts of the country may have few *native* trees, but trees have been planted. This was the case in Riverside, California, where I grew up. Some native trees grew along the Santa Ana River, but most trees were planted: vast groves of orange trees and a variety of trees to line the streets. A number of streets are named after trees: Lemon, Lime, Orange, Mulberry, Spruce, Cedar, Pine, Palm, etc.

Riverside has sometimes been called “The City of Beautiful Trees.” When I was in the seventh grade, we were required to write an essay about trees. Little then did I realize that, years later, I would write numerous books and articles—and, now, even an article on trees!

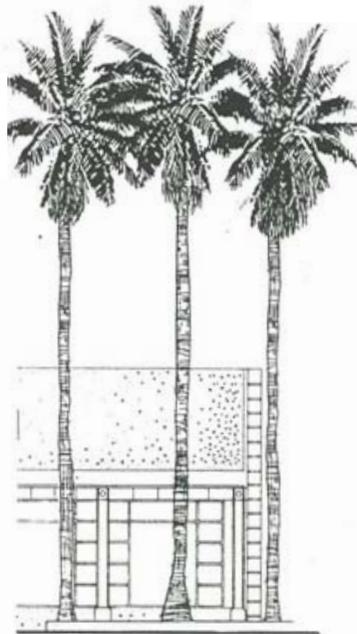
Palm Springs, as the name implies, has palm trees. There are *many* palm trees in this area. I don’t know that there are a million—and I am not aware of any factual estimate—but there are *many*. The main street, Palm Canyon Drive, is lined with over a thousand palm trees that were planted years ago. But if one follows Palm Canyon Drive south of town, there are over 3,000 *native* palm trees in the rugged Indian Canyons. These are the *Washingtonia filifera* (California Fan Palm)—more grow here, it is said, than anywhere else in the world! What a delight it is to hike along the stream in this lush oasis, past unusual rock formations, and through groves of these stately palms!

Most people realize that palms grow in *warm* climates, so it is no surprise they are here. But, interestingly, in very close proximity there are huge pine trees—which thrive in a *cooler* climate—growing in abundance. What makes the difference is elevation. Palm Springs

is located right at the base of Mount San Jacinto. In the space of six horizontal miles, the vertical rise to the 10,804-foot summit is one of the most abrupt elevation changes anywhere in the country.

One can drive Highway 74, “The Palms to the Pines Highway” and, as its name implies, literally go from palms to pines. With its many twists and turns, it was chosen for scenes in the 1963 comedy *It’s a Mad Mad Mad Mad World*. But the much quicker way to go from palms to pines—in less than 15 minutes—is the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. Upon exiting the mountain station, one is surrounded by pine trees—Sugar Pine, Ponderosa, Jeffrey, Lodgepole, and others—growing here because the temperature averages 30 degrees cooler than on the desert floor!

This past summer, when temperatures in Palm Springs were in excess of 100 degrees, it was a pleasant 70 degrees as I walked among the pine trees at the higher elevation. As I thought about these huge trees, and from a viewpoint looked at the palm trees far below, the idea to write this article came to my mind. I had already written an article to which I gave the simple title FOOD, and another called WATER. So this one (as though part of a series) would be called TREES. Printed copies of these articles will be sent upon request, or you can view them on our website: www.ralphwoodrow.org



Some kinds of palm trees have slender and very yielding trunks, allowing them to sway back and forth in a storm without breaking. Readers may recall seeing photos of such trees on tropical islands bent nearly to the ground, yet unbroken, during hurricane-force winds.

On June 28, 1992, we were awakened at 4:57 am by a 7.3 earthquake, later referred to as the Landers Earthquake. Not knowing how destructive this earthquake might be, we quickly went out of the house into our backyard. The tall palm trees on our property were swaying back and forth, *but there was no wind!* It was an eerie feeling.

In the Bible, palm trees are *often* mentioned. The first biblical reference is when the children of Israel, having left Egypt, found an oasis in the desert: “Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and *seventy palm trees*, and they camped there near the water” (Exod. 15:27).

While this is the first biblical reference to palm trees *as such*, indirectly the palm is referred to earlier—in Genesis. The same word from which palm tree is commonly translated, provided the basis for a woman’s name: *Tamar*, the daughter-in-law of Judah (Gen. 38:6). Apparently this was a highly regarded name, for King David’s daughter was also named Tamar, as was his granddaughter (2 Sam. 13:1; 14:27).

Tamar (palm tree) also appears in some place names: Baal-tamar (Judges 20:33), Hazazon-tamar (2 Chron. 20:2), and Tamar, a town near the Dead Sea (Ezek. 47:19). In that same general area, Jericho—often mentioned in the Bible—was called “the city of palm trees” (Deut. 34:3; Judges 3:13).

A palm tree at the residence of Deborah, an Israelite judge and prophetess, became known as the Palm of Deborah. “She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided” (Judg. 4:5).

In a vast desert, palm trees were a welcome sight to weary travelers, as a place of refuge and life-sustaining water. It is understandable how from early times the palm came to symbolize hope, victory, life!

This is probably why the palm was so prominent in the decoration of the Jerusalem Temple. Along with cherubim and flowers, carvings of palm trees were overlaid with gold. *Numerous* verses mention palm trees that were inscribed throughout the Temple—on doors, walls, supports, and gate posts (1 Kings 6; Ezek. 40-41).

In Jewish history, as a symbol of *victory*, palm branches were used by Simon Maccabeus who celebrated “with thanksgiving, and *branches of palm trees*, and with harps, and cymbals, and with viols, and hymns, and songs: because there was destroyed a great enemy out of Israel” (1 Macc. 13:51).

Again, as a symbol of victory, when Jesus made his triumphal entrance into Jerusalem, people took *palm branches* and went out to meet him. With great rejoicing they shouted, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the King of Israel!” (Matt. 21:8; John 12:13).

In another victorious setting, the followers of the Lamb—a great multitude that no one could count—are pictured wearing white robes *and holding palm branches* in their hands (Rev. 7:9).

For obvious reasons, we commonly think of the Mount of Olives as a place of olive trees. But at the time of Nehemiah, palm trees also flourished there (Neh. 8:15). Palm fronds were among the materials used by the Israelites to make booths for the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:40).

Probably because palm trees stood tall, Isaiah used wording about a palm branch to signify the “head,” the

Finally, among so many verses about trees, we should not forget the part a tree played, howbeit indirectly, in the plan of redemption. Christ “bore our sins in His own body on the *tree*” (1 Peter 2:24, Acts 5:30, 10:39, 13:29, Galatians 3:13). In God’s amazing plan, a tree of death became a tree of *life*, through Jesus Christ!



Ralph and Arlene Woodrow. Photo taken in front of our house (January 12, 2008), with palm trees, and Mount San Jacinto in background.

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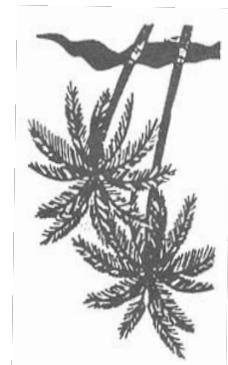
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