

Palms by the Water: Elim

"And they removed from Marah, and came unto Elim; and in Elim were twelve fountains of water, and threescore and ten palm trees; and they pitched there," Numbers 33:9-10.

Wary travelers have long found relief from the swirling sands, under the palms of desert oases. An oasis not only offers physical restoration for thirsty wanderers, it also serves as a metaphor of the restful experiences which Yahweh provides for His people. Time and again exhausted saints have been given interludes of relief, even in the midst of trying circumstances.

One example of such an experiential oasis took place in Europe, within the last century. Cornwall, England was a land of suffering and sorrow during the second World War. Food became scarce and many imported fruits, like pineapples and bananas, vanished completely from the countryside. Tired from the trials of war and its deprivations, two small children pleaded with their mother to let them pray and ask *Yahshua* to send them a banana.

"Couldn't (*Yahshua*) send us one, even though there is a war?" asked little Bob.

"Of course He could," Mother slowly responded, worrying how she could keep her children's faith strong if the desired banana didn't materialize. "But He does not always do exactly what we ask because, well... After all, a banana isn't a necessity, and (*Yahshua*) is sending us all the food we actually need."

But, in spite of Mother's cautions, Bob and Lamorna prayed faithfully for a banana. Night after night, week after week, they asked God for the desired fruit. Knowing their prayer, Mother searched the shops near and far. But no bananas were to be found in the land.

Then one day a special package arrived addressed to the children. The mysterious box, sent by their auntie, bore only two words, “Guess what?” Inside the children found a single banana.

“Look, Mamma!” Bob and Lamorna shouted with joy. “(Yahshua) sent us a banana.”

But just at that moment, Mother thought she noticed a shadow pass over Lamorna’s young face. “What’s the matter dear?”

“Well, you see Mamma, while we asked (Yahshua) for a banana, we kind of hoped that He might send us each one.”

“Don’t be so ungrateful!” Mamma admonished quickly pointing out that this one banana might well be the only one left in all of England.

“I’m not ungrateful,” Lamorna assured her mother, “We just hoped, that’s all.”

Mother took the banana and peeled back the skin for the children. To their amazement and even greater joy, inside the skin of what looked like a single banana, there were two separated bananas! It was a twin banana. Yahshua, Who loves to grant us the desires of our hearts (Psalm 37:4) had given the children one banana each.⁵³

This is the kind of loving and merciful God we serve. He is the One who paints rainbows of promise amid threatening storms. He gives us moments of rest and encouragement in times of trial and hardship. Such experiential oases are not isolated incidents. Numerous followers of Yahweh have found moments of miraculous refreshment and peace to relieve the bitterness of trial. Angels have visited the persecuted, lighting up their prison cells; banquets have been served to the hungry faithful in deserts of depravation; and twin bananas have been provided for praying children even in a war-torn land.

Such was the Children of Israel’s experience when they arrived at the lovely oasis of *Elim*. It was a joyous place of peace and plenty, a spot to recuperate from the difficulties they had gone through. It afforded an opportunity to recharge, strengthening the Israelites to face what still lay ahead.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INSIGHT

"*Elim*," was the second recorded campsite, after Israel crossed the Red Sea. The name means "ram, strong, stag." or "Terebinths, trees," (Exodus 15:27, Numbers 33:9). Some give the meaning of "*Elim*" as "strength," or "God's strong angels."² All agree, however, that *Elim* was the place of strengthening after the *Marah* trial.

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Israel's fifth campsite since Egypt, *Elim*'s numeric order also lends depth to its significance. Five is the number associated with the "Spirit bringing a window of insight." Certainly, the Children of Israel needed a major lesson in spiritual "sight," after their failure at *Marah*.

Elim was a delightful place which offered twelve springs of water and was graced with seventy palm trees. Remarkably, *Elim* was only a morning's jaunt from

Marah.⁵⁵ Yet, the bitterness of *Marah* was forgotten by the sweetness of *Elim*.

Here they camped for about a month regaining their strength for the journey ahead.⁵⁶ In *Elim*, God had supplied "rest for their souls," just as He continues to do for His Children, (Philippians 4:19).



Even now this valley of *Elim*, watered by a perennial stream, has rich pasturage for cattle, and many shrubs and trees.⁵⁷ Here, and in the surrounding area, the flocks and herds would find good sustenance, and the people, rest.

Some regions are renowned for rapid weather changes. The locals say, “if you don’t like the weather, just wait a few minutes.” Similarly the circumstantial changes God’s people experience can move from stormy trial to rainbows with head-spinning rapidity. From crisis to comfort, from suffering to smiles; we read of Israel’s refreshment; and we, too, are encouraged by *Elim*.

And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters, Exodus 15:27.

The Hebrew word here translated “wells” is the word *ayin*, which is also the 16th letter in the Hebrew *alphabet*. Interestingly, the word *ayin* is also represented by the number seventy. So both the number of the palms of Elim and the reference to its fountains point us to the significance of seventy. But, before we delve deeper into the Hebrew Gematria of this spiritually important number, there are other lessons to be found in “*ayin*.” The word refers to that which is acted upon, as the eye responds to light. This word *ayin* (also a letter) is elsewhere translated “eye” or “sight,”⁵⁸ This connects to its association with water, in that a well or fountain is a kind of “eye of water,” in the ground.⁵⁹

Here are a few examples showing how *ayin* is used throughout Scripture:

Proverbs 20:12 – The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.

1 Kings 11:6 – And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord. . .

Psalms 18:27 – For God will save the afflicted people; but will bring down high looks.

Zechariah 4:10 – For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

The eye, or more specifically, the ability to see, is a metaphor of spiritual understanding or discernment. As it says in Jeremiah 5:21:

Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not.

And as Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe, Ephesians 1:18-19.

What insights could the Children of Israel gain during their stay at Elim? What spiritual understanding were they to “see” there? They had witnessed, at Marah, how abundantly Yahweh would provide for their needs. And now, just seven miles from “bitterness,” and “rebellion,” was the blessed salvation of “Living Water”⁶⁰ in abundance. How often do we lose heart, like Israel of old, while unbeknownst to us Heavenly relief is just around the bend?

Fickle is the nature of the self-centered human heart. Like Peter, who could swear his loyalty to the Saviour only to deny Him entirely a few short hours later, the Children of Israel had praised Yahweh and pledged themselves to follow Him, on the shores of the Red Sea, only to provoke Him and rebel against His Leadership three days later.

“The... ability to see is a scriptural metaphor of spiritual understanding...”

Thus, in the quiet pools of *Elim*, the Children of Israel saw the ugly reflection of their own heart condition. They had quiet time to reflect also upon the faithfulness of their awesome God, Who was leading them.

At *Elim's* "wells," (also rendered "fountain") Israel saw a picture of the Spirit's blessing in the godly life, affording depths of spiritual insight into the providence of Yahweh. This was the first draught of understanding found in the nurturing solitude of *Elim's* oasis.

ELIM TODAY

When traveling through the region of Saudi Arabia, some have been surprised over the lack of palm trees, plentiful in nearby Egypt. This would certainly make an oasis, such as *Elim*, quite valuable.

There are two north-south wadis in this range that are large enough to be traveled. They both end to the south where they meet with an east-west wadi. Where these three canyons intersect, lies *Elim*. Today it is an extremely large oasis with hundreds of palm trees. It extends all the way across the width of the wadi.⁶⁰



The wells are randomly located throughout the oasis, and still provide water to this day. They have in recent years been walled up with concrete sides, but these twelve wells of water are still bringing access to the underground streams, hidden from the careless viewer, but manifest to those seeking the secret fountain. Without a doubt this place is the biblical "*Elim*."⁶¹

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PALMS

Often times, value is placed upon something based upon its rarity. Words are rare when it comes to the biblical descriptions of these campsites. No words are wasted and none are without meaning and importance. In fact, perhaps, because of the Bible's cryptic descriptions of the campsites, each part of the scriptural picture is

rendered even more significant. Notably, the Bible tells us that there were seventy palms to beckon the traveler to *Elim*'s oasis.

So what is the spiritual significance of the palm tree? The palm is a symbol of those strong pillars in the faith who, planted by the waters, bring refreshment to weary souls. It provides little shade in the vast desert, and its sides (bark) are rough and spiked, but high in its stores one may find sweetness (fruit), and energy to carry on.

"... Providence was working to teach Israel to flourish like these palms by being planted by Living Water."

The record of the palms of *Elim* is the first mention of the palm tree in the Bible. Mentioning these stately trees at *Elim* suggests that Providence was working to teach Israel to flourish like these palms by being planted by Living Water. God's people were also to share this spiritual refreshment with all weary souls who sought it. In fact, within the symbol of the palm we find a compelling key to true success.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But, his delight is in the Law of the LORD. And in His Law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water; that bringeth forth His fruit in his season. His leaf also shall not wither. And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper, Psalm 1:1-3.

One of the most important lessons we can learn from the palm tree is found in its root system. Unseen, but strong, passing life-giving water along to others, the roots tap and share the life-giving blessing of the Water Source. Indeed, though invisible and unsung, these roots, tapping the life-giving Water, are the reason the palm trees flourish in what would otherwise be a wasteland.

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God, Psalms 92:12-13.

The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered. . . Joel 1:12.

The palm tree is not only a symbol of strength, it is also an emblem of hope and victory. Its roots delve deep into the earth and its trunk stretches far up into the sky. Deep roots spread, out of sight, to quench its thirst. Firmly grounded and immovable, they allow the tree to grasp the earth like eagle's talons. Yet, high above its majestic trunk, submissive and pliant to the winds of strife and the wind of the Spirit, its head smiles humbly in His presence. The winds blow and puff and rage and storm, and the palm tree withstands them bending submissively where deference is needed, yet firmly anchored to the Source of Life.⁶³

For those who remain connected to the Water of Life, sheltering the weary and faithfully inviting others to the Source of Strength; the day will come when, palm branches in hand, they will sing praises before the Throne of the Most High. For these victorious ones, the palm is the appropriate icon of their Spirit-enabled success.

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb Revelation 7:9-10.

TWELVE WELLS & SEVENTY PALMS

Not only are the wells and palms meaningful in and of themselves, but also the number of them is significant. The Bible tells us that there were twelve wells of water and seventy palms at the *Elim* oasis.

One cannot help but note the reference to the Seed of Abraham in these two numbers. There had been seventy souls from the loins of Jacob who journeyed to Egypt (Exodus 1:5), four-hundred-and-thirty years earlier.¹⁷ These seventy souls had comprised the twelve tribes of Israel at its inception. Now, the spiritual and physical descendants of Jacob picked up the path of righteousness, going back home. Here we find the type of the figurative journey for anyone who "prevails with God," and is going Home.

The number seventy becomes especially significant to the *Elim* experience because it is reiterated in two ways. First, as has already been mentioned, it is the number associated with the water springs (*ayin*). Second, the Bible records that there were exactly seventy palm trees at this oasis in the desert.

There were seventy of these graceful blessings beckoning the thirsty travelers now filled with guilt and gratitude. Seventy is the number signifying the "window to the soul," and the "revelation of the Father's care." Thus, this number, repeated twice, underscores the spiritual message of the fountains. The "eye" is known as the "window to the soul." What spirit lies within may be hidden by expression and countenance. But the flash of the eye reveals the truth of the soul.

Seventy is also about our focus. True sight results from the knowledge of the Word and sensitivity to the Spirit. Interestingly, in Aramaic, the *ayin* refers to "sheep," while in Hebrew, it means the "eye." Some say that the Ancient people interpreted this as the eye of the sheep focused on the Shepherd, and the eye of the Shepherd being singular to His sheep.⁶⁴

*"There had been
seventy souls from
the loins of Jacob
who journeyed to
Egypt...
(comprising) the
twelve tribes of
Israel."*

There are also warnings associated with the *ayin* – 70 – warnings against living by human reasoning. During the time of the Judges, the Bible records judgment against Israel for

“every man did what was right in his own eyes,” (Judges 17:6, 21-25).²⁴

The *ayin* that stands for seventy is a silent letter. Why? Because it is the “Be-still-and-know-that-I-am-God” (Psalm 46:10), letter of the *alephbet*. Both the *aleph*, representing God’s sovereignty, and the *ayin*, signaling the work of the Holy Spirit, are silent letters, to teach us that the only way to “see” God is in silence.

Thus, at *Elim*, the Children of Israel were not only invited to rest; they were also to encounter the Truth. Yahweh had certainly revealed His faithfulness and care, in spite of their ungrateful spirits and uncommitted hearts. Now in the sheltered stillness came the quiet invitation: “You have not been worthy of My Providence. But, I can change the heart. Surrender fully to Me, and I will be your complete Source of Life.”

So, why were there twelve wells, apparently symbolizing twelve sources of life-giving water? The twelve wells are significant in that there was water for each of the twelve tribes, yet the source of water, for all the wells, was the same underground aquifer.

Not only is the number twelve significant to the formation of Israel, it also bears importance in the establishment of the Early Christian Church. Yahshua chose twelve disciples to carry the Gospel to the whole world. Thus, in both events, the number twelve refers to the foundation of the Heavenly Church on earth and its Gospel commission, as symbolized by the fountains of life-giving refreshment.

*“The only way to
“see” God is in
silence.”*

But the spiritual math doesn’t stop there. Twelve wells for twelve tribes: multiplied by one thousand, the number often used to represent ultimate or total completion, brings us to the latter-day number, 144,000. Twelve is the Kingdom number: $12 \times 12 = 144 \times 1000 = 144,000$. This represents God’s end-time Kingdom in its ultimate extent.⁶⁵

More than being mere numbers, the numbers found in the walk through the “wilderness” are all about His spiritual message to us. The number twelve teaches us, in each setting, about Yahweh’s government. Number seventy, in every setting of its use, reveals His universal punishment and restoration. Here at Elim, His “Kingdom” in the “wilderness.”

The twelve wells and seventy palm trees all bore the secret code for life everlasting. "Twelve," was the number of the Kingdom and those who have learned sound doctrine, and "seventy" revealed the focus and insight required for Heavenly admittance.

FURTHER INSIGHTS FOR THE EYE

We are told that the average person blinks about twelve times a minute.⁶⁶ That fact should lend some food for contemplation and comparison. Then in the *Sermon on the Mount*, Yahshua referred to the “eye” twelve times, stating its function and warning against its misuse. There is that mysterious number again: Twelve, the Kingdom number, hiding the Way from frivolous onlookers, but revealing a window into its secrets viewable to the “seeing soul.”



By examining these “eye” statements made by Yahshua in His Sermon on the Mount, we may find the deeper spiritual insight to draw from the twelve wells at Elim:

1. If thy right eye offend thee (causes you to stumble into sin), pluck it out, Matthew 5:29.
2. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, Matthew 5:38
3. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, Matthew 5:38 (Repeated)
4. The light of the body is the eye, Matthew 6:22

5. If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light, Matthew 6:22
6. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness, Matthew 6:23
7. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, Matthew 7:3
8. But considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Matthew 7:3
9. *(The one visually impaired by the "beam" foolishly offers his neighbor)* Let me pull the mote out of thine eye, Matthew. 7:4
10. And, behold, a beam is in thine own eye, Matthew 7:4
11. Thou hypocrite, first cast the beam out of thine own eye, Matthew 7:5
12. And then thou shalt see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye, Matthew 7:5

"... If your view of life is focused on the Kingdom of God, you will be guided into more and more light..."

The concept of "good eye" and "bad eye" are Hebrew idioms, meaning "generosity" verses "greed."⁶⁷ Certainly, a greedy person has his eyes closed to the needs of others. We may say that his life is "full of darkness," since he is self-absorbed. Furthermore, from Yahshua's twelve eye references, we may extract spiritual application from the "wells" of life. If your life is colored by bitterness, scorn, envy, or any other spiritual darkness, the polluted water will destroy you! You must prayerfully get those "beams" out of your spiritual viewpoint. But, if your view of life is focused on the Kingdom of God, you will be guided into more and more light, revealing and healing further darkness in the soul.



The sin of the eye is a fundamental and deep-seated one. In the paradise of God, our first parents fell over wrong use of the "eye." The woman "saw" that the tree was good for food (Genesis 3:6).

May we not allow our gaze to draw us into “greener pastures,” like wayward sheep soon straying from our Master; but, may we keep our "eyes" on the Shepherd of our faith.

*Looking unto (Yahshua) the Author and Finisher of our faith,
Hebrews. 12:2a*

Seventy, the value of the *ayin*, “the window of the soul” also frames a complete revelation of Yahweh through the seventy names of God,⁶⁸ which He is writing upon us through the lessons of the wilderness. Frank Gaines, Berkley’s political figure during WWII, wrote the following thought worth pondering: “Only he who can see the invisible can do the impossible.”⁶⁹

Let us take heart in the lessons from the wilderness. After God leads us through the trying moments of Marah, He guides us on the path to the restoration of Elim. After the baptism of suffering comes the strengthening relief. There, in the nurturing stillness, we find grace for greater faithfulness and insights for victory in the tests that remain ahead.



SUMMARY OF CHAPTER FIVE

- Following spiritual difficulties and times of trial, our loving Heavenly Father promises periods of rest and spiritual rejuvenation. At *Elim*, the Children of Israel were invited to rest and encounter the Truth.
- *Elim*'s 12 wells and 70 palms were symbolic of Israel. Seventy is the number signifying the “window to the soul,” and the “revelation of the Father's care.” It is symbolic of the eye of the sheep being fixed upon its shepherd.
- At *Elim*, we learn the lesson of how to use the “eye of faith.” We are to fix our spiritual focus upon Yahweh. In so doing, our souls will be filled with ever-increasing light. Never are we to allow our “gaze” to turn unto wickedness.