

# Seed Germination in the Bible

<http://plantphys.info/religion/seed.shtml>

Botanically we know quite a bit about seeds and how they germinate. We know that a seed consists of a protective seed coat, some kind of storage tissue with nutrient reserves, and a dormant plant embryo. We further know that under the correct conditions the dormant embryo can be "awakened" to germinate and grow into a mature plant. I have some of the details on this botanical process in my Plant Physiology pages.

What does the Bible say about seed germination? This time I am quoting from the New Revised Standard Version (Jesus' words in red).

Probably the most-famous parable about seed germination and plant growth is this one:

## **Luke 8: 4-8**

<sup>4</sup> When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable:

<sup>5</sup> "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up.

<sup>6</sup> Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture.

<sup>7</sup> Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it.

<sup>8</sup> Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold." As he said this, he called out, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!"

Because the disciples asked, Jesus explained this parable for us in plainer terms:

## **Luke 8: 11-15**

<sup>11</sup> Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

<sup>12</sup> The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.

<sup>13</sup> The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away.

<sup>14</sup> As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.

<sup>15</sup> But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance."

I will detail responses to some of these verses in topics on soil, water, and weeds elsewhere on my website. For this topic we glean from Jesus' parable only about those seeds in good soil. Here we will study about how they sprout and later I will add a topic on bearing fruit.

Before we begin, I just need to remind you that my interpretation is that the word of God brought to us by Jesus was LOVE.

The book of John delves closer to the seed germination mechanism:

## **John 12: 23-25**

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified

<sup>24</sup> Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

<sup>25</sup> Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

It is interesting that Jesus chose these words. We know botanically that the embryo in the seed is not dead and does not die before it germinates and grows into a mature plant. What was Jesus trying to say?

The words of verse 25 tell us that Jesus saw life as a prelude to something better and more enduring. If you love life then you lose this life and enter into that eternal life. If you hate life, or live a life entrenched in hate, then you keep that life of hate for eternity; that is hell.

Paul was particularly taken with the illustration of a seed losing its life as a seed to become a mature plant. He used this idea in many of his letters to various early churches. I'll use a few of these here.

### **Romans 7: 4-6**

<sup>4</sup> In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God.

<sup>5</sup> While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.

<sup>6</sup> But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

We could interpret this passage as simply a parallel illustration of the change brought about via Jesus' ministry. The Old Testament covenant between God and the Jewish people had become encumbered with details and elaborated extensively with worldly process (see in Leviticus and Deuteronomy). Jesus' message was that God's new covenant was for all people and was based not in process but in the simple concept of loving God and each other. This simpler covenant, in one step, replaced all the complex Judaic laws. The old covenant "died" in its worldly focus and was supplanted by the new covenant focusing on the spirit...rather than the mechanics...of the covenant.

But while this is certainly a reasonable analogy, Paul was interested in getting much more personal with the Romans...

### **Romans 8: 5-6**

<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

<sup>6</sup> To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

### **Romans 8: 9-10**

<sup>9</sup> But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

<sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

The point here is that we must put to death our own preoccupation with worldly things and transform our minds to focus on matters of the spirit. This concept, love, is of unimaginable power and can overcome the seeming strength of earthly power. Paul added this assurance in his letter...

### **Romans 8: 37-39**

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

<sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Here Paul has detailed a portion of his ministry...an important kernel reiterated elsewhere in his letters. He saw that the embryo in the seed is transformed but that the love continues through its development into a mature plant. It is this hope in the love of God and in His mercy that our full potential can be realized. Our part in the bargain is to work toward the transformation from seed to plant. Paul had advice for that too:

## **Romans 12: 1-2**

<sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.

This must have been a very strange concept for early Christians. The Jewish and pagan thought about sacrifice was that the offering was killed in a bloody ritual on an altar. Levitical laws detailed precisely how these killings were to be carried out. Paul's concept of a "living sacrifice" presents a new way of looking at human life. It places a higher value upon what a living person can do as opposed to what a dead body can do. If you think back on the Old Testament stories you see them in a different way. Able was good but dead, his life particularly but also his death had little impact upon the rest of Biblical history. Cain, though guilty of a heinous crime fathered peoples who impacted Biblical history in major ways. It was the living, not the dead, that had the impact. God's behavior with Abraham's attempted sacrifice of his son now has a different meaning. God's message there was that the sacrifice was not important, but the devotion and transformation of one's life (!) was the critical point. And ultimately with Jesus, it was not so important that He died, but that He lived! The empty cross, the empty tomb, the road to Emmaus, these are the important points. Death has no victory...it is love that triumphs through life.

The rest of Romans 12 is wonderful advice for leading your life along the pathway of transformation. I'd say it is "required reading!" The basic concept of this chapter, though, is well summarized in another of his letters:

## **Philippians 4: 8-9**

<sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

<sup>9</sup> Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

To the church in Corinth, Paul wrote along parallel lines:

## **1 Corinthians 15: 20-22, 36-44, 47-56**

<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

<sup>21</sup> For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being;

<sup>22</sup> for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.

<sup>36</sup> Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.

<sup>37</sup> And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain.

<sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

<sup>39</sup> Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

<sup>40</sup> There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another.

<sup>41</sup> There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed star differs from star in glory.

<sup>42</sup> So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.

<sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

<sup>44</sup> It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

<sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.

<sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as the man of heaven, so are those who are of

heaven.

<sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

<sup>50</sup> What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

<sup>51</sup> Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed,

<sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

<sup>53</sup> For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

<sup>54</sup> When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

<sup>55</sup> "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

<sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

## **2 Corinthians 9: 6-10**

<sup>6</sup> The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

<sup>7</sup> Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

<sup>8</sup> And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

<sup>9</sup> As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

<sup>10</sup> He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

Paul added more details on bringing about the transformation of one's life in his letter to the Ephesians...

## **Ephesians 6: 10-20**

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.

<sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

<sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

<sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness.

<sup>15</sup> As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.

<sup>16</sup> With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

<sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.

<sup>18</sup> Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

<sup>19</sup> Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

<sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly as I must speak.

Paul was very explicit with similar advice to the Colossians...

### **Colossians 3: 1-17**

<sup>1</sup> So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

<sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,

<sup>3</sup> for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

<sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup> Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).

<sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient.

<sup>7</sup> These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life.

<sup>8</sup> But now you must get rid of all such things--anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.

<sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices

<sup>10</sup> and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.

<sup>11</sup> In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

<sup>12</sup> As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

<sup>13</sup> Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

<sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

<sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

<sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

<sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

In summary, then, Paul used Jesus' illustration of seed germination to instruct the early Christians about what they must do to transform their lives to take part in the new covenant. Our goal is to put to death our lives focused on worldly things and to put on a new life in the love of the Spirit. This transformation to a spiritual life we are assured leads to and connects with the eternal life to come.