



ויאמר האסד
אל העצים, אם באמת
אתם משחים אתי
לולד עליכם, באו
חסד בצלתי
ואם-אין-תצא אש
מן-האסד ותאכל
את-ארצי הלבנון.

And the bramble said to the trees,
'If in truth you abhor me as King over
you, then come and take shelter in my shade;
But if not, let fire come out of the bramble
And devour the cedars of Lebanon!'

KALLERSON 14th March 2014

Artwork by Douglas Kallerson

Judges 9:1-15 (Abimelech King of Shechem, Part I)

(Typed 8 January 2024) The words of the passage today include a parable by Jotham to the people of Shechem. He uses metaphor to convey his thoughts, comparing trees to people. Unlike today, growing up in the seventies brought interesting music to our ears.

Starting in the mid to late 60s, bands began to introduce complicated tapestries of music mixed with stories. Albums like “Tommy” and “Quadrophenia” by the Who made thematic presentations that covered entire albums.

One band, Rush, employed this style. One of their albums, “Hemispheres,” debuted in 1978 containing only four songs. Two of these songs divided into separate sections, often played separately, but one of the stand-alone songs was called “The Trees.”

The song is similar enough to what Jotham proclaims here in Judges that I immediately wondered if Rush got their inspiration for it from this passage. There is nothing to substantiate this, but it seems logical to me that Neil Peart, who wrote the lyrics, may have had some memory of Jotham’s words and formed the song from that.

I bring this up because years ago when I started to preach, I said to myself that if I ever did a sermon on Judges 9, their song would be a part of my analysis of Jotham’s parable. Well, here we are, and there you go.

Text Verse: *“But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God;
I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.
⁹I will praise You forever,
Because You have done it;
And in the presence of Your saints
I will wait on Your name, for it is good.” Psalm 52:8, 9*

John Lange says the following regarding Jotham’s parable –

“The parable belongs to the most remarkable productions of Israelitish life, not only on account of its political significance, but also for what may be called its literary character. Fable and so-called apologue are of oriental, non-Israelitish, as also non-Grecian, origin. They spring from a pantheism in which trees and animals furnished symbols for expressing the popular ideas. Although rooted in the religious vivification of nature, their employment was nevertheless brought to maturity by the pressure of social necessities. ... They furnished the people with individual consolation against general misery. In their original appearance among the Greeks also, they fail not to exhibit this

character. In the same way, Jotham speaks to the tyrants of Shechem in this popular language, which all understand. He does not speak like a prophet, for he is none, and Baal has stopped the ears of his auditors. He does not even speak of the power and mighty deeds of Jehovah, from whom his own name is derived. He speaks of “Elohim” and his retributions—of the Deity in the general sense in which the heathen also acknowledge him. He speaks altogether in their language, popularly, with popular wisdom.”

I disagree with his thoughts on such words being non-Israelitish and non-Grecian in origin. Rather, such parables are a part of the universal conscience instilled in us by God. Cultures all around the world use such thoughts, even if the form is different.

It is true that many of these cultures are pantheistic. But that is not the intent here. However, Lange is right that Jotham doesn't refer to Yehovah at all. Rather, he uses the general term for God (or gods), *elohim*. And not only that, but he does it without any preceding article to indicate a right relationship with Him.

Rather, he uses a general term that could as easily be translated as gods as it can be God. In fact, some scholars and translations use the general “gods.” The entire passage is devoid of a close and personal connection to the Lord with the exception of the name Jotham.

Let's get into it! Great things are to be found in His superior word. And so, let us turn to that precious word once again, and... May God speak to us through His word today, and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. The Seventy Sons of Jerubbaal (verses 1-6)

The narrative of the life of Gideon ended in the previous chapter. Only one of his many sons was named. It is the Bible's standard way of introducing a new figure into the narrative. The account closed out, saying –

“Then Jerubbaal the son of Joash went and dwelt in his own house. ³⁰Gideon had seventy sons who were his own offspring, for he had many wives. ³¹And his concubine who *was* in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech. ³²Now Gideon the son of Joash died at a good old age, and was buried in the tomb of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

³³So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god. ³⁴Thus the children of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had delivered them from the

hands of all their enemies on every side; ³⁵ nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal (Gideon) in accordance with the good he had done for Israel.”
-Judges 8:29-35

¹ Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal went to Shechem,

vayelekh avimelekh ben yerubaal shekhemah – “And went Abimelech son Jerubbaal Shechem-ward.” The narrative picks up immediately with the one named son of those closing words. The only other named son to this point was Jether who was recorded in Judges 8:20.

Abimelech means My Father is King, Father of a King, Father is King, Father Reigns, etc. It can even mean Desired Counsel. The exact one of these is to be determined from the surrounding context.

Jerubbaal means Let Baal Strive. The name is used nine times in this chapter while the name Gideon is never used. It reminds us of the act that established his judgeship in the first place –

“But Joash said to all who stood against him, ‘Would you plead for Baal? Would you save him? Let the one who would plead for him be put to death by morning! If he *is* a god, let him plead for himself, because his altar has been torn down!’ ³² Therefore on that day he called him Jerubbaal, saying, ‘Let Baal plead against him, because he has torn down his altar.’” Judges 6:31, 32

Shechem is in the tribal inheritance of Ephraim. Of the name Shechem, Cambridge says, “The town lies on the watershed (1870 ft.) between the Mediterranean and the Jordan basins, hence perhaps its name, *shoulder*.”

Shechem means Shoulder. However, that comes from *shakam* signifying to incline, as inclining the shoulder to a burden. Hence, it is normally translated as to rise or start early. Abarim defines Shechem as “[Having a Sense of] Responsibility.”

Of Abimelech, it next says he went...

¹ (con’t) **to his mother’s brothers,**

el akhe imo – “unto brothers his mother.” This means that Abimelech went into the inheritance of Ephraim to his relatives of that tribe. He was related to them through his mother even though his father, Gideon, was of Manasseh. Next...

^{1 (con't)} **and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying,**

vaydaber alehem v'el kal mishpath beith avi imo l'mor – “and spoke unto them and unto all family house father his mother, to say...” It is good to remember that his name, Abimelech, was not given by his father. Rather, the text read *vayasem eth shemo avimelekh* – “And he set his name: Abimelech.”

As there was no change in subject after stating that he was the concubine's son, this indicates that it was not Gideon who gave this name. Rather, Abimelech set this name upon himself. Therefore, he claimed a title as much as giving himself a name.

As such, it indicates he is planning a conspiracy or conspiring to assume authority and is doing so with his family members of a different tribe (Ephraim) than that of all of his brothers of Manasseh. However, the record already said –

“Then the men of Israel said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us, both you and your son, and your grandson also; for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian.’

²³ But Gideon said to them, ‘I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you.’” Judges 8:22, 23

There was no line of succession given. But Abimelech, disregarding this, is obviously claiming that he will, in fact, succeed Gideon. It would explain why he has set a new name upon himself. As such, he says...

² **“Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem:**

Rather: *daberu na b'azne khal baale sh'khem* – “Speak, I pray, in ears all masters Shechem.” Using the word *baal*, master, lord, husband, etc., is intentional. It is a term that will be used sixteen times in this chapter. Abimelech is talking to his mother's brothers and is asking for the leaders of each household to determine a matter...

^{2 (con't)} **‘Which is better for you, that all seventy of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?’**

Following the blunder of the KJV, the NKJV continues to obscure the intent of the passage: *mah tov lakhem hamshol bakhem shivim ish kol bene yerubbaal im m'shol bakhem ish ekhad* – “What good to you: ‘Ruling in you seventy man all sons Jerubbaal, if ruling in you man one?’”

The word used is *mashal*, to rule, not *malakh*, to reign. As noted previously, Solomon reigned (*malakh* – as in 1 Kings 1:35) over Israel, but he ruled (*mashal*) “over all kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt” (1 Kings 4:21).

The word *mashal*, rule, is never used concerning Saul, the first king of Israel. Rather, each time it is said that he reigned (*malakh*). There is minimal overlap between the two words because they signify two different things.

The word *mashal*, rule, is used twice in this chapter, and both are in this verse. The word *malakh* is used seven times. These are the only uses of the word in all of Judges when referring to a person of Israel.

Abimelech sets before his brothers a false proposition. Gideon had already said that the Lord would rule over Israel. Nothing was said about any of his sons ruling, not seventy, not one. However, it can be inferred that the ephod that Gideon made and set up in Ophrah conferred upon the house a sense of authority it was never intended to grant.

Thus, it became the snare by which this plot would be brought to fruition. As it said –

“Then Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and to his house.”

-Judges 8:27

Also note that Abimelech calls his father Jerubbaal, not Gideon. Gideon is the one who contended with Baal, the same as the name, Baal, used in this account. It provides a reason for calling the men of this town *baale* (masters) rather than *anshe* (men). Abimelech is setting the tone of the coming events through his careful selection of words: rule, masters/men, seventy/one, etc.

Of the number seventy, Bullinger says it “is another combination of two of the perfect numbers, seven and ten. ... As compared with the sum of two numbers, the product exhibits the significance of each in an intensified form. Hence 7 x 10 signifies perfect spiritual order carried out with all spiritual power and significance. Both spirit and order are greatly emphasised.” Next, he says...

^{2 (con't)} **Remember that I *am* your own flesh and bone.”**

There is an emphasis in the words: *uzkheartem ki atsmekhem uvsarkhem ani* – “And remember for your bone and your flesh, I.” Abimelech sets a contrast between the seventy sons of Jerubbaal and himself. “They are of Manasseh while I am of Ephraim.

They are not your kin while I am your bone and your flesh. Which is better to rule over you?" The words are deceptive and manipulative. However...

³ And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem;

vaydaberu akhe imo alav b'azne kal baale sh'khem – "And spoke, brothers his mother, upon him, in hearing all masters Shechem." The clause carefully repeats the words of Abimelech. As he requested, so they performed.

There is no indication either way whether they knew that Gideon had said the Lord would rule over them. Despite this, the next words indicate that they were swayed to accept his false claim concerning the matter...

^{3 (con't)} **and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother."**

They repeat the emphasis spoken to them: *vayet libam akare avimelekh ki amru akhinu hu* – "And stretched their heart after Abimelech, for said, 'Our brother, he.'" The word heart, being singular, shows that the masters of Shechem were united in intent and purpose. There was no dissension among them.

They saw an opportunity for a member of their own tribe to rule as king, and that would mean their city, from which he hailed, would be the king's seat. As such...

⁴ So they gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith,

vayitnu lo shivim keseph mibeith baal berith – "And gave to him seventy silver from temple Baal-Berith." Judges 8:33 said –

"So it was, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel again played the harlot with the Baals, and made Baal-Berith their god."

Although it doesn't say how long after Gideon's death these events took place, it could not have been long. Abimelech is attempting to seize a power and authority that doesn't even exist.

Unless the sons of Gideon openly made a pact of continued rule among themselves, of which the text says nothing, then Israel would have quickly known that there was currently no leader. And yet, Abimelech was able to secure money from the house of Baal-Berith that didn't exist until, or only became operational again, after Gideon's death.

Or it could be that the name Baal-Berith is derived from what occurs in this account along with what has already happened at this same location. In Genesis 18, the Lord made a vow to Abram in this location –

“Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites *were* then in the land.

⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.”

-Genesis 18:6, 7

Likewise, Jacob also built an altar here –

“Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which *is* in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. ¹⁹ And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for one hundred pieces of money. ²⁰ Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel.” Genesis 33:18-20

Also, in Joshua 24, it said –

“So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that *was* by the sanctuary of the Lord. ²⁷ And Joshua said to all the people, ‘Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God.’” Joshua 24:25-27

The name Baal-Berith means Master of the Covenant(s). The word Covenant is singular, but Jones’ Dictionary concludes that this construction is better-rendered plural. Thus, the name Baal-Berith, if rightly translated in the plural, might indicate the covenants that took place at this location, inclusive of the one coming in the next verses.

If so, and this seems likely, then Matthew Poole appears to be correct in saying –

“This place they chose, to signify that they still owned God, and their covenant with him; and did not worship Baal in opposition to God, but in conjunction with him, or in subordination to him.”

⁴ (con’t) **with which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him.**

Literally: *vayiskor bahem avimelekh anashim reqim upkhozim vayelkhu akharav* – “And hired in them, Abimelech, men empties and bubblings.” Abimelech hired men who were completely useless to society.

The first word used to describe them is *req*, an adjective meaning empty, and coming from *ruq*, to pour out, and thus empty. The second word is new and rare, *phakhaz*. It is a verb coming from a primitive root meaning to bubble up or froth as in boiling water. Thus, it signifies to bubble.

Both words, being plural signify empties and bubblings. Thus, men who are of no substance at all. John Gill calls them men of light heads and empty brains. That is certainly a good description of them.

⁵ Then he went to his father’s house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone.

It is all singular: *vayavo beith abiv aphratah vayaharog eth ekhav bene yerubaal shivim ish al even ekhath* – “And goes in house his father Ophrah-ward and kill his brothers, sons Jerubbaal, seventy man upon stone one.” Despite having worthless men with him, the entire bloody account is accredited to Abimelech alone. And it may be that he personally accomplished the actual execution while the others only assisted.

Either way, the seventy were all killed on one stone. The idea being conveyed is that the payment of silver was one piece per son of Jerubbaal. Silver in the Bible refers to redemption. The word *even*, or stone, is derived from the root of *banah*, to build. The name Ophrah means Of the Dust.

^{5 (con’t)} But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself.

vayivather yotham ben yerubaal ha’qatan ki nekhba – “And remained Jotham son Jerubbaal, the youngest, for hidden.” The same word used to describe him, *ha’qaton*, the youngest, was used to describe Othniel, the younger brother of Caleb.

It is likely he was the youngest son of Gideon, but even if not, it is a descriptor indicating that he was at least a younger son of his. His name comes from Yehovah and *tam* meaning complete, perfect, undefiled, upright, etc. Thus, his name means Yehovah is Upright, Yehovah is Perfect, or something similar. After this bloody attack...

⁶ And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo,

vayeasthu khal baale sh'khem v'kal beith milo – “And gathered all masters Shechem and all Beth Millo.” The same people from Shechem who agreed to appoint Abimelech to rule over them are brought together to enact that agreement. It also now includes “all Beth Millo.”

The name comes from *beith*, house, and *male*, to fill. Thus, it means House of Filling or House of Fulness. However, the idea of filling can indicate an outcome. When a woman's days of carrying are filled, they are completed (Genesis 25:24). When a man's hand is filled, it means he is consecrated to a task (Exodus 28:41). When a person fills another's words, he confirms them (1 Kings 1:14).

Therefore, the meaning may extend to House of Consecration, Affirmation, Completion, etc. As such, the name appears to be derived from the event, saying something like, “And gathered all masters Shechem and all House of Consecration.” It thus speaks of all the people who came to the ordination of their king...

^{6 (con't)} **and they went and made Abimelech king**

vayamlikhu eth avimelekh l'melekh– “And kinged Abimelech to king.” Right off the bat, whether legal or illegal, Abimelech is the first noted king in Israel.

It is a kingship ordained by man, not by the Lord, but the terms are specific. He reigns (*malakh*) rather than rules (*mashal*) as a king (*melekh*). Other than Jabin, the foreign king of Judges 4, the term will be used only concerning Abimelech in Judges.

^{6 (con't)} **beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that was in Shechem.**

The words are difficult and widely translated: *im elon mutsav asher bishkhem* – “with oak, standing, which in Shechem.” The word “with” means that this was the designated place for the matter to take place. At that location was the oak, a symbol of strength.

The next word, *natsav*, is a verb signifying to stand. The form is causative. Something was caused to stand. It therefore appears to be referring to the events of Joshua 24:27 seen earlier –

“And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.”

As such, one can see the reason why the temple is called Baal-Berith, Master of the Covenants. It would also explain why Shechem here is called Beth Millo, House of

Consecration. It is a remembrance of the events that took place in the past, including at the time of Joshua.

*Listen to the trees, and they will tell you
Hear what they have to say
What is it a tree will or will not do?
And why has God created them in each way?*

*Some trees provide shade while others bear fruit
Some have wood for burning on a cold night
Each is made, a particular purpose to suit
Some give a painful rash, others wondrous delight*

*Hear what the trees have to say
Each created by the wisdom of God
They attend to our needs by night and by day
And so, His creative efforts we shall gladly laud*

II. The Trees (verses 7-15)

⁷ Now when they told Jotham, he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. And he said to them:

vayagidu l'yotham va'yelekh vayaamod b'rosh har g'rizim vayisa qolo vayiqra vayomer lahem – “And told to Jotham, and went, and stood in head Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice, and called, and said to them.” In hearing that they have made Abimelech king, Jotham takes action to rebuke the people.

Mount Gerazim is the mount of blessings called out according to the word of Moses from Deuteronomy 27. That was accomplished by Joshua in Joshua 8. As for calling out from the head of the mount, it is rather high, and he would not be heard by the people in Shechem from there.

However, there is no reason to assume he cared about that. If only a few people of Shechem harvesting on the mount or nearby heard, the point would be made. He is simply uttering a parable, intending it to be a prophecy and a curse over the masters of Shechem. Thus, it hardly mattered whether they all heard him or not.

Gerizim comes from the word *garaz* – to cut, cut up, or cut off. Being a plural word, the meaning is something like Cutters Down. It may refer to those who harvest, due to the fertility of the mountain. This is the last time it will be mentioned in Scripture.

A mountain, *har*, is a lot of something gathered. It is synonymous with a large but centralized group of people. As for his words, Jotham begins his discourse to the people of Shechem, saying...

⁷ (con't) **“Listen to me, you men of Shechem,
That God may listen to you!**

shimu elay baale sh'khem v'yishma alekhem elohim – “Listen unto me masters Shechem, and listens unto you God.” It cannot go without notice that the word Elohim is used eight times in this chapter. Six of those refer to the true God and two to a false god. However, the Lord (YHVH) is never mentioned.

The meaning of his words could be that if they will hearken to what he says and turn from their treachery in allying with Abimelech, God will listen to their petitions for mercy. Or it could be that he wants them to hear his words of cursing upon them just as he wants God to hear their words of proclaiming a king in Shechem.

Whatever the intent is, the substance of his parable begins with...

⁸ **“The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them.**

halokh halkhu ha'etsem limshoakh alehem melekh – “Going, have gone the trees to anoint over them king.” The words introduce the thought that will be continued throughout the parable. Of the entirety of it, Adam Clarke says, “This is the oldest, and without exception the best fable or apologue in the world.”

Cambridge notes, “Part of a fable of this kind, taking the form of a dispute between the trees, has been discovered in the library of Ashurbanipal.” His reign was around 631 BC in Iraq.

The intent of Jotham’s words is to introduce a sense of morality that is obviously lacking in the minds of the masters of Shechem. He wants them to consider what they have done and to realize that the path they have chosen will only lead to disaster.

As for the words, “to anoint over them king,” this tells us that even though a king had not yet been appointed over Israel, the process of anointing such a leader was not unknown to the people. With the thought of the trees, meaning the people, looking to anoint a king over them, Jotham continues...

⁸ (con't) **And they said to the olive tree,
'Reign over us!'**

vayomru lazayith m'lokha alenu – “And said, to the olive, ‘Reign, you, over us!’” Some try to shove Gideon into the symbolism here, referring to his refusal to reign over the people. This may be, but because three different fruit trees are given the opportunity to reign, this seems unlikely.

Also, there is no need to make the parable into a list of specifics. If one tree is Gideon then who would the next two trees represent? Rather, Jotham is making a point about the event that took place. The only specific items to be compared are Abimelech and the thorn bush. As for the olive, it is the most noteworthy tree that surrounded Jotham.

Its fruit was, and remains, highly prized. Olives are used for eating, oil, soaps, and more. The oil is used for lighting lamps and cooking food, among other uses. The wood is prized for its beauty and can be burned for warmth. Jotham recognizes this as the finest of the trees...

**⁹ But the olive tree said to them,
'Should I cease giving my oil,
With which they honor God and men,
And go to sway over trees?'**

vayomer lahem ha'zayith hekhodalti eth dishni asher bi y'khabdu elohim va'anashim v'halakhti lanua al ha'etsim – “And said to them the olive, ‘I cease my oil which in me they honor God and men, and go to wave over the trees?’”

The olive is incredulous. How could he step down from his exalted position to rule over the other trees? Through him and his oil, God is glorified, as in the burning of the priestly lamps, additions to sacrifices and offerings, etc. And through him, man is honored such as in the anointing of priests, kings, guests, and so forth.

As for the olive itself, it is a symbol of religious privilege. For example, it reflects the Spirit working through those who are included in this privilege. The olives receive their fatness from the roots. The branches receive this fatness and produce olives which are then used to put forth light before the Lord. Next...

**¹⁰ “Then the trees said to the fig tree,
'You come *and* reign over us!'**

vayomru ha'etsim lat'edah lekhi at malkhi alenu – “And said the trees to the fig, ‘Come, you, reign over us!’” The fig is yummy, tasty, delectable, piquant, and delicious. It provides shade and it is useful for sewing coverings to hide oneself, although not very

well. Though maybe not as majestic as the olive, it is a remarkable specimen of God's favor upon man.

As for the biblical significance of the fig, it does not refer to Israel the nation. That is a misinterpretation that has been passed on for eons. Rather, the fig speaks of the spiritual connection between God and man. When this was lost in the garden, they attempted, by their own works, to restore that connection through the use of fig leaves covering the disconnect, the shame of sin.

When Jesus cursed the fig, it was a parable concerning the place He was coming from and going to, the temple, which is the place where the spiritual connection with God was effected for the people. In His words, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again" (Mark 11:14), He was indicating that the temple that served the law would never again be the source of connection to God. Instead, it would only come through Him.

¹¹ **But the fig tree said to them,
'Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit,
And go to sway over trees?'**

vatomer lahem hatenah hekhodalti mathqi v'eth t'nuvathi ha'tovah v'halkhti lanua al ha'etsim – "And said to them, the fig, 'I cease my sweetness and my produce, the good, and go to wave over the trees?'"

The fig is hugely, even whoppingly, succulent, sweet, and satisfying. It knows this and is as incredulous as the olive. "Why should I give up on what is so marvelous to do something of less importance? Let the other trees go elsewhere for a leader!"
Therefore...

¹² **"Then the trees said to the vine,
'You come *and* reign over us!'**

vayomru ha'etsim lagephen lekhi at malokhi alenu – "And said the trees to the vine, 'Come, you, and reign over us!' The vine bears grapes for eating and for drinking. From it comes wine that "makes glad the heart of man" (Psalm 104:15).

Without going into all of the amazing details of grapes, vineyards, and wine, suffice it to say that vineyards represent the cultural side of humanity. There are various vineyards that represent various cultures. Vineyards produce grapes, or cultural expressions, and these are mixed together through a mashing process to produce wine.

In the Bible, wine symbolizes the merging together of these expressions into a result. The thing that ought to happen can happen, symbolized by wine. It is as if an act of reasoning is occurring, and an intended result is realized.

Solomon uses wine in Proverbs 9 as a result of the workings of Wisdom. It is as if we are “seeing wisdom as wine drawn from the grapes of observations and deductions” (Abarim). Wine then represents our reasoning and that which will change our minds. A perfect example of this is found in Jesus’ words of Matthew 9 –

“Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” Matthew 9:17

Jesus was speaking of the law and grace. The new wine is the new dispensation of grace to come. The old wine was the dispensation of the law. If one were to introduce the new concept into the old, it would not work because the two are incompatible. Only if one put the new wine into the new wineskin and received the new wine would the mind be changed.

Likewise, in His first miracle, Jesus changed water into wine. He did it with water in jars used for purification. This was what was used to wash with. It wasn’t intended to be drunk. But in one stroke, He changed the water to wine, and thus the function of the jar and the applicability of its contents.

Understanding this, the vine itself is the basic expression of a thing. Jerusalem is equated to an outcast vine in Ezekiel 15. It was only good to be burned. The expression of Judah was supposed to reveal God, but it was worthless and revealed nothing of value.

Jesus, however, says He is the true vine in John 15. He is the true expression of God. His branches, His people, come forth from Him as an expression of Himself to bear fruit in that state in which they exist.

¹³ **But the vine said to them,
‘Should I cease my new wine,
Which cheers *both* God and men,
And go to sway over trees?’**

vatomer lahem ha’gephen hekhodalti eth tiroshi ha’sameakh elohim va’anashim v’halakhti lanua al ha’etsim – “And said to them, the vine, ‘I cease my sweet-wine, the rejoicer God and men, and go to wave over the trees?’” Another note of incredulity! The

vine serves a marvelous purpose that can't be set aside to do something so base and pointless as to lead the trees. Thus...

¹⁴ **“Then all the trees said to the bramble,
‘You come *and* reign over us!’**

vayomru khal ha’etsim el ha’atad lekh atah malakh alenu – “And said all the trees unto the buckthorn, ‘Come, you, reign over us.’” The *atad*, or buckthorn, is painful but otherwise mostly useless. Gesenius identifies it as the southern buckthorn or “Christ’s thorn.”

Outside of being used as the name of a place in Genesis 50, the only other use of this word is in Psalm 58 –

“Before your pots can feel *the burning* thorns [*atad*],
He shall take them away as with a whirlwind,
As in His living and burning wrath.” Psalm 58:9

This perfectly pointless and poignantly painful tree responds...

¹⁵ **And the bramble said to the trees,
‘If in truth you anoint me as king over you,
Then come *and* take shelter in my shade;**

vayomer ha’atad el ha’etsim im b’emeth atem moshkhim othi l’melekh alekhem bou khasu b’tsili – “And said, the buckthorn unto the trees, ‘If in truth you anoint me to king over you, come shelter in my shade.’” Of this, John Lange gives the sense –

“There lies in this the sharpest censure for the trees. The thorn-bush itself can scarcely believe that its election as king is honestly meant (בְּאֵמֶת). Equally striking is it, that Jotham makes the thorn-bush speak of the trees as wishing to ‘anoint’ him. Anoint with what? With oil. But the ‘oil tree’ has already refused to be king over such subjects! The idea is: they anoint with oil, the symbol of peace, while they have murder and the opposite of peace in their hearts.—The thorn-bush declares his readiness to give them all he has. They are at liberty to shelter themselves in his shadow. But he gives no protection against the sun, and his branches are full of thorns.”

Their chosen king is worthless, he will be painful, and he is already suspicious of those who have appointed him over them. It is a recipe for disaster. He even says as much to them...

15 (fin) **But if not, let fire come out of the bramble
And devour the cedars of Lebanon!**

v'im ayin tetse esh min ha'atad v'tokhal eth arze ha'l'vanon – “And if not, go out fire from the bramble and devour cedars the Lebanon.” The cedar, or *erez*, ultimately comes from a word signifying firm or strong.

The cedars of Lebanon are referred to many times in Scripture. They denote strength and firmness. When equated to a person or a nation, it refers to one that is great and mighty. In Ezekiel 17, Zedekiah, king of Judah, is equated to a sprig taken from a cedar of Lebanon. Assyria is equated to a cedar in Lebanon in Ezekiel 31.

Jotham's words mean that this vile buckthorn, Abimelech, would ignite a fire as rapidly burning thorns will do, and it would consume even the mightiest and most esteemed who chose him as king.

As for Lebanon, it is used as a picture of works under the law. It comes from the verb *lavan*, to be white. That is identical to the noun *lavan*, or brick, because bricks turn white when fired. That word carries the connotation of works because bricks imply the work of man as opposed to stone which is created by God.

With this verse complete, we must end for the day. The rest of the verses will come next week. Adam Clarke sums up the parable of Jotham, saying –

“The condensed moral of the whole fable is this: Weak, worthless, and wicked men, will ever be foremost to thrust themselves into power; and, in the end, to bring ruin upon themselves, and on the unhappy people over whom they preside.”

He is correct in this. It is seen in our nation today. The most perverted and worthless man imaginable is rushing our nation to the brink of disaster in every possible way he can conjure up. But this has been seen throughout history. A mere corporal, a vile and senseless man, brought the nation of Germany to the brink of total destruction.

It is important for us to choose leaders well, but we shouldn't trust them to bring us anything other than temporary peace and prosperity. In the end, the only One we can truly put our hope in is Jesus. Anything or anyone else will lead us to a sad state of futility. Let us hold fast to our Lord who alone is worthy of our hope, love, and devotion.

Closing Verse: “It is *better to trust in the Lord
Than to put confidence in man.*” *Psalm 118:8*

Next Week: Judges 9:16-21 *Detailing every speck, As we trek 'em. Yes, so we do...*
(Abimelech, King of Shechem, Part II) (29th Judges sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. It is He who judges His people according to their deeds. So, follow Him, live for Him, and trust Him, and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

Abimelech King of Shechem, Part I

Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal
Went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers
And spoke with them and with all the family
Of the house of his mother's father, sharing his druthers

Saying, "Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem
'Which is better for you, that all seventy (them or me alone)
Of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one
-----reign over you?
Remember that I am your own flesh and bone

And his mother's brothers spoke all these words
Concerning him in the hearing of all Shechem's men
And their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech
For they said, "He is our brother, that's settles it then

So they gave him seventy shekels of silver
From the temple of Baal-Berith
With which Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men
And they followed him down the street

Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah
-----and killed his brothers
The seventy sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone
But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left
Because he hid himself, hiding all alone

And all the men of Shechem gathered together
All of Beth Millo, and they went (GPS could trek 'em)
And made Abimelech king beside the terebinth tree
At the pillar that was in Shechem

Now when they told Jotham
He went and stood, but not just lingering about
On top of Mount Gerizim
And lifted his voice and cried out

And he said to them:
“Listen to me, you men of Shechem
That God may listen to you!
Check out my words, yes be sure to check ‘em

“Going, have gone the trees to anoint over them king.”
“And said, to the olive, ‘Reign, you, over us!’”
“And said to them the olive,
‘I cease my oil which in me they honor God and men, and go to wave over the trees?’”
“And said the trees to the fig,
‘Come, you, reign over us!’”
“And said to them, the fig,
‘I cease my sweetness and my produce, the good, and go to wave over the trees?’”
“And said the trees to the vine,
‘Come, you, and reign over us!’”
“And said to them, the vine,
‘I cease my sweet-wine, the rejoicer God and men, and go to wave over the trees?’”
“And said all the trees unto the buckthorn,
‘Come, you, reign over us.’”
“And said, the buckthorn unto the trees,
‘If in truth you anoint me to king over you, come shelter in my shade.’”
“And if not, go out fire from the bramble and devour cedars the Lebanon.”

Lord God, turn our hearts to be obedient to Your word
Give us wisdom to be ever faithful to You
May we carefully heed each thing we have heard
Yes, Lord God may our hearts be faithful and true

And we shall be content and satisfied in You alone
We will follow You as we sing our songs of praise
Hallelujah to You; to us Your path You have shown
Hallelujah we shall sing to You for all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...