

THE PARABLE OF THE TREES

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Lesson: Judges 9:1-20

Gideon was one of the great judges of Israel. During the time when the children of Israel were being ruled by the Midianites, the Lord raised up Gideon, and sent him with only three hundred men, and he beat the whole army of the Midianites. The people were very glad at this, and Gideon was their judge, and they wanted to make him their king. But Gideon would not do this. He didn't want to rule over them, he was happy as he was, and he wanted, maybe that they should stay with the Lord as their only king.

Unfortunately, when he died, one of his sons, Abimelech, decided he would like to be king. So he went to a city, and got them to help him, and he gathered a lot of vain, wicked people, and they went off and killed the other seventy of Gideon's sons. That was a terribly wicked act, wasn't it? Abimelech then became king.

One son of Gideon was not killed, and he was called Jotham. He went up into a mountain where he was safe from attack, and he lifted up his voice, and spoke, telling a story, a parable, which had a meaning inside. It was about the time when the trees wanted a king. Now that was a foolish thing for them to want, because they didn't need a king, and when they asked some of the better trees, they wouldn't become king. The olive tree said no. He said he did a good job of work, he produced olives, and he gave oil which people used to anoint kings and priests. Why should he stop this good work to rule over the trees? The fig tree said the same. He produced good fruit, and men liked the fruit. Why should he stop bringing forth fruit, to be king? The vine tree said the same, for he gave grapes, which made wine, and he loved doing this.

The rather foolish trees then asked the bramble bush to be king. Now the bramble bush is ugly, and it doesn't bring forth fruit. It only brings forth thorns. So it wanted to be king, and said it would, as long as the other trees dwelt under its shadow, that is as long as all the other trees did exactly what it said. If they didn't, it would burn them up, even the great wonderful cedars of Lebanon—huge straight trees, which had been growing for hundreds of years. So the trees had a king, but a bad one. Jotham told this story to show that Abimelech was going to be a king like that.

This story has an inner meaning, and one we can learn quite a bit from. Each of the trees stands for a certain kind of feeling and thought in us. The olive tree, which takes thousands of years to grow, and lives a long time, and brings forth useful oil, stands for the love of the highest heaven, and the thoughts there.

When we have the feelings of the highest heaven in us, you know they don't try to rule us. They are very gentle, good feelings. The angels who give us these thoughts don't try to be king in us, they lead us gently, for they want to do good things for us. So when the olive tree said it wouldn't be king, that stands for the loves of the highest heaven: when they are in us, they bring us good things, happiness; they don't try to rule us harshly.

The fig tree stands for obedient feelings and thoughts. When we have kind thoughts about helping the bodies of others, these are the feelings and thoughts of the lowest heaven. They don't try to rule us also, they just make us feel happiness. And the vine tree brings forth grapes, which make wine. This stands for the feelings and thoughts of the middle heaven, which also don't try to rule us.

What does the bramble bush stand for? It is a pretty useless tree, and it brings forth thorns only. It stands for evil feelings and thoughts, the ones that come from hell. Now if we let these thoughts and feelings come into our minds, we will find something very different. We will find that they do want to rule us. They don't want to make us happy at all, and they want us to serve them. Remember how the bramble bush said that it would be king, but all the other trees had to do just as it said, and if they didn't it would burn them up? That is the way the feelings of hell act in our minds.

Take jealousy. Sometimes we feel jealous of someone else, and wish we had what they had, or wish we could have the friends that they have. Now that jealousy comes from hell, and if we let it come into our minds, we will find that it is like a thorn tree in our minds. It hurts us, and makes us miserable, and it tries to rule us. It makes us do things we should not do, it tries to burn up our good feelings, and we find ourselves feeling angry, saying and doing things that are very unkind. Why? Because jealousy is trying to be king. This is so with all the evil feelings. They try to be king, whereas the good ones are gentle, they lead us instead of trying to force us to do what they say.

You know in countries we sometimes find that the good people are not the ones who want to rule, who want to be kings. They love doing their work, and helping other people. But the wicked people love to rule, and they try to force other people to do what they say. Often therefore we get a ruler who is like the bramble bush. In our minds that is so too. If we have the good feelings of the heavens in us, we will find that they work for our happiness, and make us really happy in doing what we can for other people. But the moment we let a love from hell into our minds, it tries to be like the bramble bush. It doesn't bring happiness, that is, it doesn't bring forth fruit. No. It tries to rule us, and make us do just what it wants, and it burns up the good feelings that we have. That is the warning of this story—to beware of the feelings of hell, for they always take away our freedom and our happiness, where the feelings of heaven lead us gently towards what is good for us. *Amen.*