

## A Parable for this Time and Season

One of the most engaging parables in the Old Testament is found in the book of Judges, chapter 9. It is well worth consideration in the context of the current campaign season:

The trees once went out to anoint a king over themselves. So they said to the olive tree, "Reign over us." The olive tree answered them, "Shall I stop producing my rich oil . . . to go sway over the trees?"

Then the trees said to the fig tree, "You come and reign over us." But the fig tree answered them, "Shall I stop producing my sweetness . . . ?"

Then the trees said to the vine, "You come and reign over us." But the vine said to them, "Shall I stop producing my wine . . . ?"

So all the trees said to the bramble, "You come and reign over us." And the bramble said to the trees, "If in good faith you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon."

The parable is told to a contingent of community leaders who have already made the decision to have a ruthlessly ambitious and murderous "bramble" of a man to be their king. Needless to say, the new king is soon despised and things come to a bad end.

The current applicability of this parable may be questioned. In the presidential campaign, for example, there has been no shortage of contenders, especially in the Republican camp. This may seem to invalidate the parable, inasmuch as the bramble appears to be the only willing candidate. However, in its original context, the point of the parable is not the shortage of candidates. The thrust of the parable is to call into question the willingness to choose for leadership someone whose only qualification seems to be a lust for power. The "shade" he has to offer amounts to nothing. There were other, much more attractive, alternatives that were not fully pursued.

What lessons can be drawn from the parable? There are two that seem pretty obvious to me. First, be careful who you choose to rule over you! You will have to live with the consequences. Second, the leadership you get may be just what you deserve! It's perilous to settle for the candidate who asks nothing of you but your unwavering allegiance. You will get burned.

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