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Item Type	Article
Authors	Benavidez, Edwardneil
Publisher	Asia Pacific Theological Seminary
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Download date	2026-11-09 15:24:57
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/236674

[*AJPS* 13:1 (2010), pp. 125-142]

TRUTH AND INTEGRITY: CONSIDERING THE ISSUE OF STANDARD (JUDGES 9:7-21)

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Introduction

In this paper, we will focus on Jotham's speech in Judges 9:15-21. Wilcock has identified the theme of 'truth and integrity' in the whole story of Abimelech in chapter 9.[1] Looking at a different angle, we will establish the function of 'truth and integrity' as we explore both the narration part and the speech part of our passage. In the narration part, we will find that the burden to regain 'truth and integrity' was the primary motivation of Jotham and this gave him the courage to confront those who abandoned 'truth and integrity.' In the discussion on the speech of Jotham itself, we will find that 'truth and integrity' are the main grounds for the judgment that Jotham pronounced in his speech.

Translation

7aAnd when they told to Jotham, he went and stood at a high point (of) Mount Gerizim, **b**and he lifted up his voice and proclaimed and said to them, **c**"Listen to me lords of Shechem, so that God may listen to you.

8aOnce upon a time[2] the trees went to anoint over them a king, **b**and they said to the olive tree, **c**"Rule over us."

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[1] Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Judges: Grace Abounding* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 89-105.

[2] הָלוֹךְ הָלְכוּ, the infinitive absolute functions as a literary device in introducing stories.

[9a]The olive tree said to them, [b]"Should I cease[3] my fatness (producing oil) by which the gods and men are honored and go and wave over the trees?"

[10a]And the trees said to the fig tree, [b]"Come, (you) reign over us."

[11a]And the fig tree to them, [b]"Should I cease my sweetness and go and wave over the trees?"

[12a]And the trees said to the vine, [b]"Come, (you) reign over us."

[13a]And the vine said to them, [b]"Should I cease my wine which gladdens the gods and men and go and wave over the trees?"

[14a]And all the trees said to the *atad*[4], [b]"Come, (you) reign over us."

[15a]And the atad said to the trees, [b]"If in truth you are anointing me to reign over you, [c]go (and) make refuge under my shade, [d]but if not, [e]let fire come out from the atad tree and (let it) eat the cedars of Lebanon."

[16a]And now if you have acted in truth and with integrity when you made Abimelech king, [b]and if you have done good with Jerubaal and with his household [c]and if you have done to him as recompense [his hands] (to what he had done to you).

[17a]Since my father waged war on your behalf [b]and he [threw] risked his life [from what is in front] [c]and he had delivered you from the hand Midian.

[18a]But you have stood up against the house of my father this day, [b]and you have killed his sons seventy [man] (men) upon one stone [c]and you made Abimelech son of his maidservant king over the lords of Shechem because he was your brother.

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[3] הֶחָדַלְתִּי, in the perfect but denotes immanence.

[4] The *atad* tree will be identified in the discussion below.

[19a]But if in truth and with integrity you have done with Jerubaal and with his sons this day, [b]rejoice in Abimelech and (may) he rejoice in you also.

[20a]But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and let it consume the lords of Shechem and Beth-Millo, [b]and let fire come out from the lords of Shechem and from Beth-Millo and consume Abimelech."

[21]And Jotham escaped and fled and went to Beer and settled there away from the face of Abimelech his brother.

Literary Context

Judges 9:7-21 is part of the Abimelech story, the second sequel of the Gideon narrative.[5] Abimelech's story begins in 9:1 although he is already introduced in 8:31. In 8:30, the narrator tells us that Gideon had seventy sons with his many wives, yet, none of the sons was named. The narrator also did not mention the places of origin of the wives of Gideon. On the other hand, Gideon's concubine is said to be from Shechem and Gideon's son with her is named. Two names, Abimelech and Shechem somehow came out of the blue. This is not unintentional. Here the narrator is introducing two important names which will play an important role in the stories that will unfold.

After the narration about Gideon's death and how the Israelites again did evil and worshipped other gods, we read about the two names that were mentioned in 8:31, Abimelech and Shechem. Abimelech goes to Shechem (v. 1) with a proposal to his relatives and to the leaders of Shechem. With very convincing words, Abimelech proposes to his relatives and to the leaders of Shechem to make him king over them (v.2). He tells them that it would be very much more favorable with them that one man, who is their relative, would rule over them rather than the seventy sons of Gideon. The proposition was appealing to the Shechemites so they agreed and conspired with Abimelech against the sons of Gideon (v.3). They gave Abimelech seventy pieces of silver which he used to hire men who were "empty and reckless"

[5] Barry Webb, *The Book of Judges: An Integrated Reading*, Journal for the Study on the Old Testament Supplement Series 46 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 154-155.

probably mercenaries,[6] to help him in his assassination plot (v.4). Abimelech, together with the mercenaries went to Ophrah and executed their plan to assassinate all the seventy sons of Gideon. All the sons of Gideon were killed except one, Jotham, who was able to escape. It is not recorded whether Abimelech or the mercenaries of the Shechemites knew right away that one son of Gideon had escaped. After the completion of the plot, the people of Shechem together with their leaders[7] made Abimelech their king. After hearing of this, moved by his conviction, Jotham went on top of Mount Gerizim and rendered a speech to the people of Shechem. Here is where Jotham delivered the passage that will be discussed in this paper.

Structure of Judges 9:7-21

Narration	7ab
Speech	7c-20b
Summons	7c
Fable	8-15
Narration	8a
Invitation	8bc
Response (Rhetorical Question, Declined)	9
Invitation	10
Response (Rhetorical Question, Declined)	11
Invitation	12
Response (Rhetorical Question, Declined)	13
Invitation	14
Response	15a-e
Narration	15a
Conditional Statement	15b-e
Protasis	15b
Apodosis	15c
Protasis	15d
Apodosis	15e

[6] Boling translates אֲנָשִׁים רֵיקִים וּפֹחֲזִים as "idle mercenaries." Robert Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 171.

[7] "all of Beth-millo is appositional to the leaders of Shechem." Boling, 171.

Pronouncement of Judgment	16-20
Conditional Statement	16-17
Protasis 1	16a
Protasis 2	16b
Protasis 3	16c-17c
Indictment	18
Conditional Statement	19-20
Protasis	19a
Apodosis	19b
Protasis	20a
Apodosis	20b
Narration	21

Jotham‟s speech is enclosed by narration, describing the movement of Jotham (vv. 7 & 21). In both narratives we can see the verb הָלַךְ in the Qal form. Here Jotham is moving from one direction to another. At the beginning, he went (הָלַךְ) and stood at the top of Mount Gerizim where he made his speech. At the end of his speech, Jotham went (הָלַךְ) on his way to escape from Abimelech and fled to Beer.

Jotham begins his speech with a summons (v. 7c). Then it is followed by a fable story narrated by Jotham (8-15). The fable consists of four parts in which the first three parts are completely parallel – all with an invitation and a negative response. The fourth part parallels with the first three parts only in the first line (the invitation in v. 14) and deviates in the response (v. 15). Jotham utilizes this change in the pattern as a jumping board to the climax and main thrust of his speech which follows this fable – pronouncement of judgment (16-20) against the act of disloyalty of the Shechemites and the betrayal and murder done by Abimelech. This pronouncement of judgment starts and ends with conditional statements (16-17; 19-20), between these conditional statements is an indictment against Abimelech and the Shechemites (18). We can observe that the conditional statements in this pronouncement of judgment parallel the conditional statements in the fourth part of the fable. As Ogden has observed, in this fourth part of the fable, specifically the last part "provides the structural element in vv. 16-20."[8] Also it is important to take note that the phrase אִם־בֶּאֱמֶת "if in faithfulness" or "if in truth" in v. 15 is repeated in 16-20 and also the

[8] Graham Ogden, "Jotham‟s Fable: Its Structure and Function in Judges 9," *The Bible Translator* Vol. 46, No. 3 (July 1995): 304.

phrase תֵּצֵא אֵשׁ "let fire go out." The fable also has some clear points of reference– the trees which are in search of a king refer to the Shechemites and the *atad* refers to Abimelech, which connects it with the application of the fable and to the whole narrative on the Abimelech Story. Webb points out that the main thrust of the speech is not the fable but the application of the fable.[9] This is valid. But because of the connection of this application to the fourth part of the fable, correct understanding of the fourth part of the fable will be helpful in understanding the main thrust of the speech- the application. The fourth part of the fable is undeniably significant. What we could learn from it is relevant to our interpretation of the whole of Jotham‟s speech.

Truth and Integrity in the Narration (Verse 7a & 21)

At the beginning, Jotham went (הָלַךְ) and confronted the Shechemites. Jotham's action here in v. 7 was not his first action in the narrative. Earlier in the chapter in v. 5, we read that Jotham hid himself. This was the reason why he was able to save his life from the tragic massacre that Abimelech did to his brothers. Jotham had good reason to be alone and to mourn for the loss of his brothers. There was no reason for him to come out of hiding because for sure his life was still under threat. But when Jotham heard that Abimelech was enthroned as king in Shechem, he went out from hiding and he suddenly became courageous enough to appear at the top of Mount Gerizim to deliver his pronouncement of judgment to the people of Shechem. The venue chosen by Jotham, Mount Gerizim, for his speech was a strategic place. Wilcock points out the significance of Mount Gerizim as one of the two mountains where Moses commanded Joshua to proclaim the law and the blessing and curses.[10] He stood not literally on top as one would translate בְּרֹאשׁ, because according to Moore, Mount Gerizim was more than nine hundred feet high on the southern side of Shechem[11] and Jotham could have been unseen[12] and unheard[13] by the

[9] Webb, 155.

[10] Wilcock, 95.

[11] George Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), 246.

[12] Boling, 172.

[13] Moore, 246.

people of Shechem if he were at the summit of the mountain. Boling proposes the possibility that the place where Jotham made his speech was at Tananir, whose ruins are some four hundred meters above Shechem located on the lower slope of the mountain.[14] This also coincides with the description of the location pointed out by Moore which was "a projecting crag on the side of the mountain, which forms a triangular platform overlooking the town and the whole valley, a natural pulpit admirably suited to the requirements of the story."[15]

At the end of his speech, Jotham went (הָלַךְ) on his way to escape from Abimelech and fled to Beer (a Canaanite town during that time) because of fear of Abimelech. Jotham was never without fear even when he delivered his judgment and curse to the Shechemites for he kept his distance from the Shechemites. He delivered his speech on a strategic part of Mount Gerizim where he could be seen and heard yet would be able to escape if the Shechemites tried to pursue him.

In spite of his fear, Jotham was determined that he had to be heard by the people of Shechem and that he had to deliver the speech at the same spot where the laws were reiterated by Joshua (Dt 27:12). What could have caused this courage and determination? His speech on this mountain has one basic purpose, to condemn and to pronounce judgment upon the abandonment of 'truth and integrity' by Abimelech and the Shechemites, as evidenced by the murder that Abimelech committed in conspiracy with the Shechemites. Jotham might have been convinced that this abandonment of 'truth and integrity' would speed up the deterioration of his society. This deterioration of the society became a reality in the succeeding chapters of Judges. According to Wilcock, the loss of 'truth and integrity' in chapter 9 is so vital that it resulted in the deterioration and downward spiral of the Israelite communities.[16] Jotham stood to prevent it. He was moved to take the prophetic role and go against even the powerful force of Abimelech and the Shechemites. The conviction to uphold and regain 'truth and integrity' gave him strength to conquer his fear even for a while and deliver the judgment that was due Abimelech and the Shechemites.

Truth and Integrity in the Speech of Jotham (Verses 7b-20)

[14] Boling, 172.

[15] Moore, 246.

[16] Wilcock, 89-91.

At the mountain, Jotham begins his speech with a summons (v. 7c). His summons contains an appeal for the Shechemites to listen. This summons in Jotham's speech שִׁמְעוּ אֵלַי "listen to me" is similar to the introductory phrase used by Moses in some of his speeches requiring full attention from his audiences.[17] In some occurrences of this appeal in Genesis to 2 Kings and the Prophetic literature, the one delivering the speech tells about the blessings for those who would listen and the curses for those who would not listen.[18] Other than getting the attention of the hearers, the intention of this appeal is to invoke prophetic authority.[19] This would imply that Jotham is either calling the people of Shechem to respond positively to his prophetic message – that they would cry for forgiveness from God; or informing the people of Shechem of the inevitable judgment that they are going to face because of the evil that they have done. The latter is more possible for there was no invitation to ask forgiveness in the whole speech, and Jotham's speech was interpreted as a curse in 9:57.

The summons also states the phrase "so that God may listen to you." In Genesis to 2 Kings and the Prophetic literature, God is viewed as one who listens to the cry or prayer of people who trust in him.[20] Most of them are marginalized or in severe affliction. God is also viewed as one who listens to the cry of his people.[21] There are also instances when God does not listen.[22] For Block, here in this expression of Jotham, he contrasts the seductive promises of Abimelech which are full of self-interest.[23] Block points out that Jotham opens his speech with the possibility of a favorable response from God as they would

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[17]Ex 18:19; Dt 6:4; 27:9.

[18]Dt 4:1, 10; 5:27; 11:13, 27, 28; 17:12; 18:14 30:10; Josh 1:17; 3:9; Jer 11:3; 26:13; 35:13, 15, 17; Zec 6:15.

[19] see also Boling, 172.

[20]Gn 21:17; 30:17, 22; Jgs 13:9; 2 Sm 22:7; 1 Kgs 8:28; 2 Kgs 19:20; 20:5; 22:18-20; Is 38:5; Dn 10:12.

[21]References with שָׁמַע: Ex 2:24; 16:12; Dt 26:7; References in Judges without the שָׁמַע, but implies God listening to the cry: Jgs 3:9, 15; 6:6-8.

[22] Like in Dt 23:5; Jgs 10:10-14

[23] Block, 316.

listen to him and would respond positively.[24] Obviously, this is how the people of Shechem understood this opening statement of Jotham. This is why they listened to Jotham. But it is also possible that Jotham intended them to understand it this way while having in mind a different meaning of his expression "so that God may listen to you." In Joshua 24:26-27, Joshua "took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD." Then he said to the people, "Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, so that you do not deny your God." The large stone serves as a witness for the parties to be accountable to fulfill what has been said. Jotham might have invoked God's witness to assure the fulfillment of the judgment he is proclaiming.

Jotham continues in his speech by narrating a fable. According to Block, vv. 8-15 is the finest example of a fable in the Scripture.[25] A fable is "a short narrative in poetry or prose that teaches a moral lesson and involves creatures, plants, and/or inanimate objects speaking or behaving like human characters."[26] A fable belongs to a broad category of imaginative stories in the Old Testament literature called *mashal* (משל).[27] The place of this fable in its present location raises many issues because of its inconsistencies with its present context. Scholars have pointed out several of these inconsistencies: 1) It is observed that the fable is in poetry while within a prose narrative; 2) The fable tells about trees approaching their chosen candidate to be their king while in the narrative it was the people of Shechem who were approached by Abimelech. 3) The fable tells about four candidates to choose from while there is only one in the narrative; 4) The connection of the conclusion of the fable in v.15 with the rest of the speech in vv.16-20 seems to point out that this part was redactional, and the cedars of Lebanon are mentioned while this does not add a new insight to the meaning of the fable; 5) The fable is political in character while

[24] Ibid.

[25] Block, 316.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Silviu Tatu, "Jotham's Fable and the Crux Interpretum in Judges 9," *Vetus Testamentum* 56, no. 1 (2006): 108.

the narrative is more theological and neutral.[28] Because of these observations, scholars have made different assumptions regarding the composition or source of the fable. Fritz,[29] Moore and Soggin explain that the fable was a later insertion of a redactor.[30] Maly adds that the redactor has adapted an existing non Israelite fable referring to the phrase "gods and men."[31] Boling and Webb both assume that rather than a redactor, it was Jotham who adapted the fable story for his purpose[32]. On the contrary, Block maintains that the fable was an original composition of Jotham.[33] Although aware of the looseness of the connection of the fable which points to the possible independence from the narrative, Block says that "to argue on these grounds that the fable has been artificially inserted into the narrative is to impose modern Western standards of literary consistency upon an ancient historiographic treatise with a distinct theological and rhetorical agenda."[34] Block explains that when illustrative stories such as this fable are used in speeches, "they do not generally insist that every element of the story be consistent with every element of the rest of the speech."[35] Block points out that even with the inconsistencies, the fable

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[28] Block, 316; Alberto Soggin, *Judges, A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 174-175.

[29] Volkmar Fritz, "Abimelech und Sichern in Jdc. IX," *Vetus Testamentum* 32 (1982): 129-44.

[30] Fritz summarized by T. A. Boogart, "Stone for Stone," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32 (1985): 45-47; Moore 244-246; Soggin, 175.

[31] E. Maly, "Jotham's Fable: Anti-Monarchial," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly 22* (1960): 300-302.

[32] Boling. 173; Webb, 155.

[33] Block, 317; also L. Desnoyers, "*Histoire du Peuple Hébreu des Juges à la Captivité," Tome I, La Période des Juges* (Paris, 1922) 173; M. Adinolfi, "Originalità dell'Apologo di Jotham," *Revue Biblique* 7 (1959): 322-342.

[34] Block, 317.

[35] Ibid.

"suits the original rhetorical context and fits in perfectly with its present literary environment."[36]

In the fable, the trees set out in search of a king. First they approached the olive tree. When the olive tree declined, they went to the fig tree and offered to it the crown, the fig tree also declined. Then they went to the vine and the response was similar to the first two. Finally they offered the kingship to the *atad* (אָטָד) tree which responded differently from the others. All the first three trees, the olive tree, the fig tree, and the vine, responded similarly while the *atad* tree gave a contrasting response. We can observe from the speech of Jotham that the fourth tree represents Abimelech. The identity of the fourth tree is then key to the interpretation of this fable.[37] The first three trees are typical trees and had much value in Syria and Palestine then and even today.[38] Tatu observes that most modern translations and commentaries of the Bible translate *atad* as 'bramble' of 'thorn bush.'[39] Thus Tatu says, "By doing that, the traditional interpretation of Jotham's words assumes a highly ironical, even sarcastic, tone. Because the 'bramble' (read Abimelech) has no quality whatsoever, choosing him as king represents an undesired failure of this political project. Therefore, the intention of Shechem's citizens to elect a king immediately and despite all reasons, contradicting even common sense, pushed them to the unexpected position of enthroning the most unwelcome and unworthy candidate."[40] This, as Tatu points out, is rather rigid.[41] For Tatu, the identification of the *atad* lies in the consideration of its qualities as described in the fable, as giving shade and as being easily combustible.[42] Tatu treats these as relevant information for the identification of the *atad* tree rather than mere sarcasm.[43] Also considering "literary tradition of Mesopotamian

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Tatu, 110.

[38] Soggin, 175.

[39] Tatu, 111.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 110.

[43] Ibid., 113-114.

'contest literature,' a fable would set the non-human characters (in most cases an opposite pair) to duel verbally over their abilities. . . qualities such as shade and combustion to which direct reference is expressed in Jotham's fable should be considered as real for the fourth plant candidate."[44] Tatu points to the mention of *Atad* in Genesis 50:7-11 where Joseph and his clan held a ceremonial mourning for the death of their father, Jacob. Pointing to the possibility that *Atad* could have been a Canaanite family name given to the tree, Tatu explains that the threshing floor under the *atad* could have been a perfect place for holding a ceremony in such an arid place because of the shade it provides. The shade also explains the possibility of the existence of a threshing floor under it. Tatu also points that the *atad* parallels the tree of life in the Akkadian literature which could be inferred as a thorny tree that can provide life saving shade in a remote and deadly arid land or desert.[45] From these descriptions, modern botanists who research on the plants and trees mentioned in the scripture identify *atad* as of the *Zizyphus Spina-Christi* for it matches more closely the biblical description than the commonly accepted identification of the *atad* as *Lycium europaeum*.[46] The *Zizyphus Spina-Christi*, as described by the botanists "is a tree reaching 10 m in height, armed with spinous stipules. It prefers low altitude terrains (< 1000 m), dry lands (100 mm rainfall), with a minimum temperature of -5 to 2°C. There is no preferred soil. It extends from 0° to 20° N latitude. It is reported that its green leaf fodder is very appreciated by the locals for the domesticated herbivores"[47] Its fruits "represented not only a food resource for desert travellers, but also an alternative food resource to the fruits of the more domesticated trees of Levant (sycamore, date, fig tree, pomegranate, olive, almond, etc.), especially in times of need (famine, invasion, drought, etc.)."[48] After identifying *atad* as the *Zizyphus Spina-Christi*, a thorny tree that provides shade and edible fruit, the idea that the trees, who were in search of a king in the fable, resorted to a less capable tree when they went to the *atad* tree seems to be without support. This interpretation of the *atad* would imply that

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[44] Ibid., 123.

[45] Ibid., 115-116.

[46] Ibid.,116-122.

[47] Ibid., 121.

[48] Ibid.

Abimelech, which it represents, is not an incapable candidate for a king. It also implies that the Shechemites did not become complacent in being critical in their choice of the *atad* as king because they have already approached three who rejected their offer. What this fable critiques is whether the Shechemites and Abimelech were בֶּאֱמֶת "in truth" or "in faithfulness" and בְּתָמִים "with integrity" upon their institution of the monarchy – the enthronement of Abimelech by the Shechemites. In the fable, the *atad* tree seems to express acceptance of the offer of the trees for him to rule over them, but he gives them a condition. This condition in v. 15 seems to verify whether the trees were בֶּאֱמֶת "in truth" or "in faithfulness" as they are making the *atad* king. The *atad* affirms them that if their answer is affirmative, they could benefit from its shade. But, the *atad* also warns them that if they did not come 'in truth,' they will be consumed by the intense fire that the *atad's* very combustible wood could produce. The end of the fable does not tell about the fate of the trees and the *atad*. But we can assume that the trees will enjoy the benefits from the shade of the *atad* and they will be sure of its protection if they came 'in truth' but if they did not, the trees are in an 'irony of dilemma'[49]for they have already made the offer to the *atad* tree to be their king and could not take back the offer anymore. They will just have to face the consequences – to be consumed by fire. The ones who are in a true dilemma here are the Shechemites. As Jotham shifts from telling a story to addressing his audience, the Shechemites, he lays down his indictment to them. In the form of conditional statements and plain statements, Jotham points to the disloyalty that the Shechemites showed when they stood up against his father and conspired with the evil scheme of Abimelech in killing all his brothers and made Abimelech king over them. As mentioned above in the discussion of the structure, the structure of the pronouncement of judgment follows the structure of the ending of the fable story in v.15. Jotham used v.15 as a transition statement. Also mentioned above, בֶּאֱמֶת is repeated in vv. 16 & 19 and is partnered with בְּתָמִים "with integrity." These two phrases together in Joshua 24:14 qualify the challenge of Joshua to the Israelites to "fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity (בְּתָמִים) and truth (בֶּאֱמֶת)" in his final charge to the Israelites near the end of his life. These parallels between v. 15 and the rest of the speech in vv. 16-20 implies that as good faith or truth (and integrity) was a principle expected by the *atad* tree when

[49] Ibid., 124.

the trees came to crown him, similarly, good faith or truth and integrity are principles that must be evident upon Abimelech and the Shechemites' institution of monarchy. When they, both Abimelech and the Shechemites, acted against truth and integrity, they disregarded very important virtues which they must have as they live in the land where the LORD, the true king, is reigning. Both Abimelech and the Shechemites are guilty. The inclusion of Abimelech, who is symbolized by the *atad*, is one of the loose ties between the fable and the rest of the speech. But the point that emphasizes the value of truth and integrity is very clear. Their establishment of monarchy is not founded in good faith, truth and integrity not because monarchy is condemned but because they have acted with disloyalty and murder.[50] Also because of their evil action, the legitimacy of Abimelech's kingship as appointed by a people who opposed the kingship of the LORD is questioned and it is bound to fail and crash. They are in the dilemma of facing the inevitable judgment for what they have done is irreversible,

> "**20**But if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and let it consume the lords of Shechem and Beth-Millo, and let fire come out from the lords of Shechem and from Beth-Millo and consume Abimelech."

This evil that they have done was not just against Gideon but is also against the will of the LORD. Although nothing in chapter 9 explicitly describes the view of God on this matter, God is portrayed in v. 23 as the one who initiated the beginning of the collapse of this monarchy which Abimelech and the Shechemites have established.

Traditionally, Jotham's fable is viewed as anti-monarchial. Proponents of this view point to two things in arguing the anti-monarchial tone of the fable. First is the use of the word הֶחָדַלְתִּי in vv. 9, 11 and 13. Moore translates it "shall I cease" which he said, implies refusal of those qualified and productive candidates to take the position of power in place of their usefulness in their present valuable vocation. Moore adds that the repetition points out that the author of the fable is showing that no one in their present community would want to be king.[51] Boling translates הֶחָדַלְתִּי as "have I ceased" which implies only

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[50] See also G. E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1986), 132.

[51] Moore, 147-148.

those who have ceased to be fruitful would agree to be king.[52] The second argument points to the word לָנוּעַ translated as "to wave, sway or stagger." As Block and Moore explain, kingship here is viewed as a worthless office far incomparable with a productive vocation. Buber in his evaluation of the theme of kingship in the fable, says that kingship is not a sufficiently productive calling that one should stop pursuing one's own business and fruitfulness for the sake of it. On the contrary O'Connell views that the point of the fable is not to critique kingship but those who choose the wrong person to be king.[53] In response O"Connell argues that הֵחֵל דַּלְתִּי being in the perfect tense "presents no compelling case for anti-monarchicalism. The perfective form indicates only that the nobler trees than the bramble were preoccupied with that which God had given them to do, and for this reason were prevented from taking up a popular appointment to kingship."[54] Also in response, Lindars and Maly point out that לָנוּעַ does not necessarily connote degrading of kingship for in the context of the trees, waving over the trees gives a picture of a mighty tree providing shade and protection to its constituents.[55] Maly explains that the fable is not really against kingship but against those "who refused, for insufficient reason, the burden of leadership."[56] In reaction to Lindars and Maly, Crusemann, pointing to the other fables about kingship that were available at the same time of Jotham's fable and also provide a context to Jotham's fable, explains that the context of Jotham's fable views kingship as "unproductive, it gives no fruit, and the protective function, which it takes for itself, it cannot fulfill."[57] As Gerbrandt weighs the evidence he sides also with the traditional view.[58] Again, we can observe from the

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[52] Boling, 166.

[53] R. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 164-165.

[54] R. O'Connel, 165, notes.

[55] B. Lindars, "Jotham's Fable: A New Form-Critical Analysis," *Journal of Theological Studies* 24 (1973): 365; Maly, "Jotham's Fable: Anti-Monarchial," 303.

[56] Maly, 303.

[57] Gerbrandt, 130.

[58] Ibid.

arguments raised above that the interpretation of the *atad* is vital in resolving the issue whether this fable is anti-monarchial or not. If we identify *atad* as the the *Zizyphus Spina-Christi*, most of the arguments above become improbable. We cannot anymore say that 'waving over the trees' is derogatory for the primary service of the *atad* tree is to offer its shade. The argument also that only the unproductive would give in to the seduction of kingship becomes weak for the *atad* is not an unproductive tree. Also, we can no longer say that when the productive trees refused the leadership position, the trees resorted to an unqualified candidate because the *atad* is not an unqualified candidate. Now if the voice of the majority of other fables about kingship at that time speaks negatively about kingship as pointed out by Crusemann, this minority voice that affirms kingship but points out the value of 'truth and integrity' also deserves a hearing.

Theological Reflection

The Value of Truth and Integrity

Truth and integrity are indeed vital values in institutions not only in Monarchy or government but also in educational institutions, religious institutions, and any other organization. The loss of them assures collapse and self-destruction. It is really disheartening hearing the news about Erap Estrada, Panfilo Lacson, our government's anomalous 'ZTE' deals, bribery of local government officials, extrajudicial killings and many more. Truly, our country is in crisis because of the loss of 'truth and integrity.' Our leaders have not only lost the trust and confidence of our countrymen but also have violated and have gone against the will of God who is truth and full of integrity.

Abimelech made use of one of the ways we Filipinos are familiar with-the *Kamag-anak* (kin) incorporated. "*Ako ang piliin niyo kasi ako ang kadugo niyo*" ('elect me because I am your blood relative') because of this many times we choose to disregard 'truth and integrity' in favor of supporting our kin in whatever endeavor that they are in. Many times we are blinded by this too much affinity to the point of losing our wise judgment and perspective on things.

Sad to say but the church is not exempted from this ugly truth. We can also find in our churches deception, conspiracy, selfish promotion of self in order to be on top, hurting and damaging the reputation of people just to get that much prized position. Is the condition of the

church better? Or is the government just a reflection of the degradation of 'truth and integrity' in the church? I wonder…

It is really difficult to think of the possibility that truth and integrity could loosen its hold in the family, in the church, in the community and in every individual. But so long as we ourselves, who are called followers of Jesus Christ, hold on and uphold truth and integrity, it is our hope that this will not happen and hopefully we can affect our community.

Our Prophetic Call to Uphold Truth and Integrity

When one discerns the loss of 'truth and integrity' in a given society, whether in the family, in the local community, in the church community, or in the country, he or she must take a stand against it. Jotham was not a brave person. He was the youngest in his family v. 5, in fact he was hiding when Abimelech massacred his brothers v. 5 and feared Abimelech v. 21. But realizing the crisis in his society because of the evil of Abimelech and the Shechemites, he courageously confronted the Shechemites, though from a safe distance, and proclaimed judgment against them. With the introductory summons and with God causing the fulfillment of Jotham's curse, his speech resembles a prophetic pronouncement. Jotham took the role of a judge fulfilling a prophetic office like Deborah, Joshua and Moses who were before him. Jotham did not have the call encounter like the other judges or prophets, but he was deeply moved with the loss of 'truth and integrity on his society. Later in the history of the Israelites, the loss of 'truth (of faithfulness or righteousness) and integrity' were part of the indictment of the prophets against the evil kings, corrupted religious cults, and the greedy economic tycoons in their time. Yes, they risked their lives, but God honored them and executed his judgment on the ruling parties who had abandoned 'truth and integrity.' The same conviction must remain in us and may this conviction move us to act and uphold truth at all costs.

Our Strategy in Confronting Those Who Have Abandoned Truth and Integrity

What can one man do? Jotham was all alone, his brothers were dead. How could he fight against a kingdom? Even though Abimelech's kingdom was newly established and had not yet reached stability, Jotham's strength could not match the power of Abimelech

and the Shechemites. But this did not stop him. God was on his side, though he might not know it, and he had the wit to use the power of stories as he confronted his opponents. Jotham understood that a direct confrontation would not work against the powerful Abimelech and the Shechemites so he uses a story to be subtle in his attack. This is the same strategy that the prophet Nathan used when he confronts David in his sin. Brueggemann rightly observes in the case of Nathan, "One cannot address royal power directly, especially royal power so deeply in guilt. It is permissible to talk about speaking truth to power, but if truth is to have a chance with power, if must be done in subtlety."[59] Other than the use of stories, other prophets used human drama, Isaiah walking naked, Jeremiah carrying a yoke, to invoke subtle but powerful messages against a ruling power. I have heard stories that during the martial law here in the Philippines, people expressed their opposition using music, drama, comedy, comics, and many other creative ways to bring a subtle powerful message against a ruling power who had abandoned truth and integrity. Indeed, even if we are powerless compared to those who are abusive in their power and have no respect for truth and integrity, we can still confront them in creative, subtle but powerful ways.

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[59] Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth: In Israel's Imagination and Memory* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 63.