

TALKING BUSH FABLES FOUND IN BIBLE

Most Bible lovers would get upset at the notion that their favorite book is full of fables. Perhaps rightly so. But as a matter of fact there are two fables in the Bible.

Keep in mind that “fable” is a technical literary term. A fable is a story in which plants or animals act the way people do.

Aesop’s fables are good examples. His stories about “the Fox and the Grapes,” “the Lion and the Mouse,” “the Tortoise and the Hare,” “the Dog in the Manger,” and dozens more have survived the centuries.

(By the way, Aesop was telling his stories in Greece about the time Jerusalem was being destroyed by the Babylonians.)

All such fables hold a moral. They aren’t told just for the fun of the telling; they are told to drive home a point.

Take the story about the fox who wears himself out jumping for a bunch of grapes he can’t quite reach. Finally he drags himself away grumbling about those “sour grapes” which “no gentleman would want to eat” anyhow.

So you won’t miss the point, the fable ends with this tag line: “Every man tries to convince himself that the thing he cannot have is of no value.”

None of the fables attributed to Aesop are in the Bible, of course. But two similar stories can be found in the Hebrew scriptures. Both are about talking plants.

The first is at Judges 9:8-15. It is told by a man named Jotham when the people make his bastard half-brother king.

His fable about “the Trees who Chose a King” is a pointed warning that the people will be sorry they picked his brother instead of him.

According to the story, the trees first ask the olive tree to be their king. But the olive tree declines because it doesn’t want to stop making oil.

Next they try the fig tree, but it declines because it wants to keep on producing fruit. The grapevine also declines the nomination so it can keep on supplying wine.

In desperation the trees turn to the lowly thorn bush. It agrees on one condition: the trees will have to lower themselves and sit under its shade.

“If you don’t,” warns the bush, “fire will blaze out of my thorny branches and burn you up.”

In the long run Jotham’s fable proves to be only too accurate. His half-brother Abimelech turns out to be a loser.

His subjects keep getting into fights he can’t squelch, and he ends his career when a woman fractures his skull with a millstone. So much for the fable of “the Trees who Chose a King.”

The second biblical fable can be found at 2 Kings 14:9 and 2 Chronicles 25:18. It too is of the thorn bush *versus* the trees variety, and it has to be one of the shortest fables on record.

A lowly but presumptuous thorn bush tries to arrange a marriage contradict with a stately cedar tree, but a wild animal strays through the forest and tramples down the bush.

This fable was sent by Jehoash, the ruler of the northern Kingdom of Israel, to his upstart neighbor to the south. Amazah, the king of southern Judah, had won a few minor military skirmishes and thought he was ready to challenge his rival Jehoash.

Jehoash’s fable about the Presumptuous Thorn Bush was a pointed warning, but Amaziah wasn’t paying attention. So when he marched against his northern neighbor he got wiped out.

The “thorn bush” was captured, his troops went on the lam, and his capital fortress was breached.

These two stories about thorn bushes and trees are the only examples of fables to be found in the Jewish scriptures. There re none in the Christian scriptures.

That’s hardly enough to label the Bible a book of fables. But it is enough to keep you on your toes when you’re reading the biblical literature.

It goes to show the Bible has a choice variety of literary styles between it bindings. Not least among them are a couple of fables about talking bushes.