

Carolyn Roth Ministry

Newsletter

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Zillah

Notable Bible Woman and Plant

In Genesis chapter 4, we read about the offspring of Cain. Lamech, a seventh-generation grandson of Adam had two wives simultaneously. This is the first time that the Bible identified plural wives. Lamech's second wife was named Zillah. Although we know little about Zillah, we know that her husband was a murderer. He admitted that he murdered a young man for injuring him. Seemingly, he brags that if God planned to take sevenfold vengeance on anyone killing Cain (his ancestor), then he, Lamech, should be avenged 77 times. Contemplating Lamech's words, readers aren't sure whether he is bragging about his actions or admitting his wrong doing.

Zillah was named after a spiny, woody shrub (*Zilla spinosa*) that grows in desert. Stems can grow up to five feet tall. The plant grows as wide as tall, so that the zilla plant appears rounded. When mature, the plant zilla loosens from soil. Winds blow it across the desert. In contrast to the overall unpleasant stems and spines, *Zilla spinosa* produces a lovely four-petal lavender, occasionally pink, flower. I imagine that Zillah was named after the flower.

The website, *Flowers in Israel*, identified the brier named in Ezekiel 28.24 as the zilla plant: "No longer will the people of Israel have malicious neighbors who are painful briars and sharp thorns. Then they will know that I am the Sovereign LORD." Ezekiel's prophecy is against Sidon, a Phoenician city. Sidon gloated when Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon.

If I identified one word that encompassed the story of Zillah and the prophecy of Ezekiel against Sidon, that word is **malicious**. Malicious means a desire to cause pain, distress, or injury to another. Maliciously, Lamech injured a young man, actually murdered. Most likely, Lamech's action caused distress to the young man's family and distress to his wife, Zillah. Sidon's gloat over Judah's pain, injury, and distress was malicious. I can just imagine Sidonians rubbing hands together and smiling when Jerusalem fell.

The take-away message from the *Zilla spinosa* is that beautiful flowers may occur simultaneously with injurious spines. Importantly, we can stop pondering how loved ones hurt us and reframe our thinking. How do we, although beautiful individuals, injure and distress others with our words and behavior? A dear friend told me that another mutual friend's words hurt her. At about the same time, the mutual friend shared that she was hurt by my dear friend's words. I need to always look at my own behavior and make sure that I don't cause pain, injury, or distress.

If you live in the Roanoke area and do not have a home church, please visit St. John Lutheran Church, 4608 Brambleton Avenue, Roanoke, VA 24018. 540-774-0712. Services at 8:15 and 11:00 a.m.

Cocklebur and Idolatry

“Even if they escape from destruction, Egypt will gather them, and Memphis will bury them. Their treasures of silver will be taken over by briars” (Hosea 9.6). Most of Hosea’s book focused on what would happen to the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) if they didn’t repent. In the NIV Bible, chapter 9 is titled “Punishment for Israel.” Hosea wrote: “The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand.... because your sins are so many” (Hosea 9.7 NIV).

When Hosea identified, “even if they escape from destruction,” he referred to the destruction of the Assyrians. “Their treasurers of silver will be taken over by briars” most likely refers to Israel’s silver-plated idols worshiped in homes, but particularly those set up in high places for worship.

The briars that Hosea referenced in verse nine was the cocklebur (*Xanthium strumarium* L) Arguably, the cocklebur is the most annoying and prickly of all briars. Over 200 names and species have been identified in the *Xanthium* genus throughout the world; however, the *Xanthium strumarium* grows in Israel.

Cocklebur is an invasive plant worldwide. It can be poisonous to livestock, i.e., horses, cattle, and sheep. If other forage is available some domestic animals avoid eating cocklebur, but, some don’t. Young plants (seedlings) and seeds are the most toxic parts of cocklebur. In mankind, symptoms occur within a few hours, producing weakness, nausea and vomiting, rapid and weak pulse, difficulty breathing, and eventually death.

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Over lunch I described cocklebur to my husband who was born and reared in northern Idaho. He rode horses along back trails. He said that horses got the American cocklebur in their manes and tails. Often, dogs get cocklebur in hair. In both cases, removing the spiny cocklebur is difficult and sure to damage fingers.

When I read Hosea and most of the Bible prophets, I feel apprehensive. My country is steeped in sin, primarily idolatry. USA’s idolatry isn’t worship of man-made idols; but, worship of self. Americans place confidence in themselves, declaring “I can do it myself” or “I did it (or want to do it) my way.” Our idolatry isn’t less than what occurred in Israel when Hosea gave his prophecy.

The two short articles in this newsletter are from the book I am writing — *The Whole Earth Groans, Interpreting Bad Plants in the Good Book.*