



Shepherds Need to Know about the Biblical Understanding of Thorns and Rods

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But [the sons] of Belial [shall be] all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: But the man [that] shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the [same] place.

2 Samuel 23: 5-7 KJV

I found these verses rather arresting as I came to them during my daily reading, particularly the words and phrases in bold font. If you have been studying thematically it may be apparent to you as well. They seemed to connect and reinforce several concepts that have been coming to the surface over the past few months and to indicate information it would be good for all shepherds to recognize. In the study process even more was discovered about “thorns” and the context presented here.

These words were spoken by King David near the end of his life, after he’d answered the call of YHWH. As one who began his work as a shepherd, King David was taken out of those surroundings and given two legged “sheep.” His life represented abundant blessing and abundant stressing. Certainly he knew a lot about rods, staffs and thorns in both the physical and spiritual senses.¹ Surely we understand why this man’s last words were and are to be given serious consideration, though in our society today, the place for elders to speak into the lives of younger people is rare and seldom given.

Here they are in context and from NASB:

*Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse declares,
The man who was raised on high declares, The anointed of the God of Jacob,
And the sweet psalmist of Israel, "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue.
"The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me, 'He who rules over men righteously,
Who rules in the fear of God, Is as the light of the morning when the sun rises,
A morning without clouds, When the tender grass springs out of the earth,
Through sunshine after rain.'*

¹ If the reader hasn't read a previous introductory study on this series for shepherds and what Shepherds Need to Know about the Biblical Meaning of Rod, they can be found at this link. <http://www.set-apart-ministries.org/shepherdsneedtoknow.html>

"Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me, Ordered in all things, and secured; For all my salvation and all my desire, Will He not indeed make it grow?
"But **the worthless**, every one of them will be thrust away like **thorns**, Because **they cannot be taken in hand**; But **the man who touches them** Must be **armed with iron** and the **shaft of a spear**, And they will be completely **burned with fire in their place.** "

2 Samuel 23: 1-7 NASB

Process: Type of study and Resources

I will consider them here in three parts on the way to discovering more about what shepherds need to know about such thorns and rods:

Verses 1-4 The Words of YHWH and His Servant, David

Verse 5 Covenant with David and His House

Verses 6-7 Thorns and Rods

Just as an interesting point, I recently learned that Sir Isaac Newton, a renowned physicist, was also a serious student of ancient languages and the Word. In his book, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel, and the Apocalypse of St. John* (1733)², he noted what other biblical scholars have as well; that there is a prophetic and poetic language used throughout the Scriptures. One aspect relevant to this study follows:

*FOR understanding the Prophecies, we are, in the first place, to acquaint our-selves with the figurative language of the Prophets. This language is taken from the analogy between the world natural, and an empire or kingdom considered as a world politic. ... rain, if not immoderate, and dew, and living water, for the graces and doctrines of the Spirit; and the defect of rain, for spiritual barrenness. ... Animals also and vegetables are put for the people of several regions and conditions; and particularly, trees, herbs, and land animals, for the people of the earth politic*³

This is very much in keeping with the Hebraic viewpoint of there being four levels of interpretation. Though the original source is in Jewish literature, there is a simple yet comprehensive explanation of these levels at Wikipedia.⁴ In brief: *Pshat* – plain, simple meaning level, *Remez* - hints or hidden, symbolic level, *Derash* – comparative meaning through similar instances and *Sod* – secret or mystical

² http://www.isaacnewton.ca/daniel_apocalypse/ Drawing from this resource is not intended to be viewed as an endorsement of agreement with all of Newton's conclusions, but rather an acknowledgement of a recognized truth in the use of poetic language in Biblical prophecy. Previous generations have tended to be more Scripturally literate than is normative today.

³ Ibid; Excerpts from: http://www.isaacnewton.ca/daniel_apocalypse/pt1ch02.html

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pardes_%28Jewish_exegesis%29

meaning given through revelation or inspiration.⁵ Those who recognize the value of considering the very structure of the literature itself in fully searching out the Word of our Elohim may also recognize a thematic study approach, as Tony Robinson among others has taught⁶

Consideration of the symbolic language led to comprehension of their similarity to what Moses had commented as he completed writing and began to teach Torah (Deuteronomy 32:2) and only then did I realize the significance goes back to the Garden...and ultimately forward to our return to the Garden. The implications of the thorns and the rod apply consistently over all time. Once again, the cohesiveness and incredible depth of meaning of the Word is emphasized!

I will then offer some commentary and relevant messages that have come to my attention as I was in the process of preparing this study.

The Words of YHWH and His Servant David

These last words of David begin with a declaration of his identity: the sweet psalmist of Israel who is the son of Jesse who was given a position of authority and prestige through his anointing by the God of Jacob. He wrote that he has heard the Rock of Israel speak, declaring that one who rules while fully aware of an appropriate fear of God and His righteousness is like a beautiful sunny day after a rain that causes grass to grow. We recognize a poetic word picture here and I now see great significance though I have passed by it without much consideration many times before. Matthew Henry's commentary has a beautiful description of the application of these words for one who rules others.⁷

I first realized that this poetic picture harkens back to the words of Moses where he has described the Word he has written, the Torah, as rain which brings forth herbs and grass.

*Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.
**My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew,
as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass:**
Deuteronomy 32:1-2*

Here is a metaphor which is plainly identified in the text. The rain is His doctrine or teaching, and the plants that receive it are compared to people.⁸ After having received the rain, such leaders rule as David has described. In light of David's reference to thorns in this verse under consideration, I found it rather compelling that Moses comments were bracketed before and after by reflection on those who would prove to be stubborn and resistant, specifically mentioning the latter days.

⁵ You will find an excellent more in-depth discussion of ParDes by Frank Houtz at

<http://www.drybonesrestorationcompany.com/articles/Series/Hebraic%20Foundations/PaRaDiSe.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.restorationoftorah.org/>

⁷ Parts 1, 2: <http://www.study-light.org/com/mhc-com/view.cgi?book=2sa&chapter=023>

⁸ For more consideration of His doctrine and the connection with Messiah Yeshua's teaching, please see [Question of Doctrine](#) at our SAM website, <http://www.set-apart-ministries.org/ourdoctrine.html>

*And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book,
until they were finished,
That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying,
Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God,
that it may be there for a witness against thee.*

***For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day,
ye have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death?***
*Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their
ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them.*
***For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves,
and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you;
and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD,
to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.***
Deuteronomy 31: 24-29 KJV

*Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God.
He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment:
a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.
They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of his children:
they are a perverse and crooked generation.
Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise?
is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?
Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father,
and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.*
Deuteronomy 32: 3-7

As I began doing the word studies involved here, I saw that these words of David were very similar to those of Isaiah in a parallel structure.

*Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live;
and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*
Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people.
*Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto
thee because of the LORD thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.*
Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near:
***Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the
LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.***
*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*
*For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither,
but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud,
that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:*
***So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void,
but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.***

*For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace:
the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.*

***Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree:
and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.
Isaiah 55: 3-13 KJV***

As in David's last words, his identity is addressed first as a covenant relationship; then his position. An admonition to the wicked comes next, followed with the comparison of the rain and His Word, and with the absence of thorns there is to be an everlasting sign that will not be cut off. Some of the significance of these words did not become apparent until I did the individual word studies, which will be addressed later. Can there be doubt that Isaiah was influenced by David's parting words, as well as hearing from the same Spirit?

Covenant with David and His House

In the next portion, KJV and NKJV translations have the wording phrased to appear that this description was NOT fitting the *whole* house of David, but assuredly with *him*, while in my view other translations have phrased it as a rhetorical question:

*Although my house [be] not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant,
ordered in all [things], and sure: for [this is] all my salvation,
and all [my] desire, although he make [it] not to grow. KJV*

*"For does not my house stand so with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,
ordered in all things and secure. For will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire? ESV*

*"Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me,
Ordered in all things, and secured; For all my salvation and all my desire,
Will He not indeed make it grow? NASB*

It seems that the majority of commentators have taken it to be David's acknowledgement of the sin and weakness among his children though Adam Clarke also saw it as a kind of rhetorical question, at the same time confirming David's confidence was in YHWH, the Maker of the Covenant, more so than in the flesh.⁹ How often it is true that parents who honor our Elohim may yet have children who have lower standards! These words would seem to be an encouragement to all such parents that even King David had such concerns about his family and yet also the assurance of YHWH's favor to bring all things together in good.

Then, the verses that caught my attention are a contrasting statement about those who do not even begin to honor our Elohim. They are called "worthless" and "sons of Belial" in these translations which matches the definitions offered for the Hebrew word, בְּלִיעַל transliterated as "belial." Strong's number 1100. According to the Blue Letter Bible, it is used 27 times in the KJV, just rendered as "sons of Belial"

⁹ <http://www.godrules.net/library/clarke/clarke2sam23.htm>

most often, but also translated as *wicked, ungodly, evil, naughty* and *ungodly men*. NASB also includes *worthless, scoundrels* and *rascally*. Zodiates Lexical Aid concurs with these choices and adds that over time Belial came to be recognized as a proper name for “satan,” the adversary, as well.

From this context, it would seem to me that the interpretation that presents David’s comments as a rhetorical question would be the best “fit.” David’s covenant with God is not based on his own doing though he is known for being a man after God’s heart. It does seem to me that we must all come to the understanding, at some point, that our covenant with Him is based on HIS faithfulness, surely not on ours as we are so finite and weak, just as it was demonstrated with Abram who slept while YHWH passed through the pieces. (Genesis 15:7) Clearly there is a difference between those who acknowledge and honor this relationship from those who do not and thus are described as wicked and worthless, sons of Belial.

These worthless ones are compared to thorns. Our first recognition of this word must be negative as we understand that thorns cause pain and difficulty. We may call to mind a few examples such as the thorn Paul spoke of, the crown of thorns on Messiah’s Head, the thorns that grow up and choke the seed of the Word. It isn’t difficult to see the agricultural metaphor as we recognize that plants and trees of one kind or another are often used as descriptions of people. We may recall that one result of sin was that the ground was cursed resulting in thorns and thistles which would bring sorrow. The worthless ones, the sons of Belial, are given to wickedness and will not benefit from the light and truth that comes through a leader who has given their heart to YHWH. A very strong picture is provided here of what is needed to deal with such thorns. The simple meaning is clear enough that such people will be thrust away and that they can’t be taken in hand, just as touching thorns causes damage. The following verse indicates what will be necessary to deal with them. It was this picture that set me to further study to find additional understanding and encouragement for those who are in leadership or shepherding roles.

Thorn(s)

There are 2 Hebrew words often translated as thorns: Strong’s #329, **טֹפֵן** transliterated as *atad*, and meaning bramble, thorn or buckthorn, from an unused root probably meaning to pierce or make fast. The other is Strong’s #6975, **קֹשֶׁת**, transliterated as *qowtz*, meaning a thorn bush in the sense of pricking. It is this second word that is used in the verse under consideration. A third Hebrew word translated as thorns is Strong’s #6796, **צִנְיָנִים**, transliterated as *tsaniyn*, meaning thorn and prick; from the root word Strong’s #6791, **צָן**, transliterated *tsen*, meaning thorn and barb, from an unused root meaning prickly. This one is only used twice, in Numbers 33:55 and in Joshua 23:13.

Checking the singular word “thorn” brings up 11 Hebrew words, which include these already noted. In the Greek, there are two words for the plural thorns, and one for the singular thorn. Their meanings are all quite simply having to do with *thorns, thorn bushes* and *being pricked* or *prickly*. Vines Dictionary does not include thorns in the OT portion and in the NT portion observes the 2 Greek words noted. Reference is made to thorns as the effect of the curse on the ground (Genesis 3:18) and the contrast with the time when they are no longer and which also appears to be a thematic parallel to the entire

picture in David's words. (Isaiah 55: 1-13) It is also noted that a crown of thorns was a mockery of the garlands worn by emperors.

Checking the paleo Hebrew per Benner's AHLB I found that this particular word,  in the earlier style, is listed as having unknown connections to the root word. It was interesting to see that nearly all the words most closely related to it seemed to have something to do with *making an end* to something or a *cut off*. One interesting translation choice, used only once this way, was *to summer as at the end of a season*. It can be seen here:

*They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall **summer** upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them.*

Isaiah 18:6 KJV

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament commented on the word used for thorns in David's last words, *qowts*, and referred to both Genesis 3:18 and Hosea 10:8 where it also appears.

*And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; **Thorns also and thistles** shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;*

Genesis 3:17-18 KJV

*The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: **the thorn and the thistle** shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.*

Hosea 10:8 KJV

I will only comment briefly at this time and come back to it later in context with greater detail. Thorns and thistles are paired in both these instances: in the context of the ground being cursed due to Adam and Eve's sin and as Hosea laments the crookedness of Israel and the resulting consequences.

NOTE: There is an interesting thing, too, in the connection with pots, thorns, and people as seen in this verse.

*Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind,
both living, and in [his] wrath.
Psalm 58:9*

This word  is Strong's #5518, transliterated as *ciyr* and translated as "pots" can also mean "thorns." So before the thorns/pots can feel the thorns, he will remove them in His wrath. And lest there be doubt that the metaphor could apply to people, consider this:

*Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? **Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?** What if God, willing to shew*

his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

Romans 9:20-23

Definitions of Most Relevant Words

But the man ³⁷⁶ [that] shall touch ⁵⁰⁶⁰ them must be fenced ⁴³⁹⁰ with iron ¹²⁷⁰ and the staff ⁶⁰⁸⁶ of a spear ²⁵⁹⁵; and they shall be utterly ⁸³¹³ burned ⁸³¹³ with fire ⁷⁸⁴ in the [same] place ⁷⁶⁷⁵.

The meanings of the words used follows though thorns and sons of belial have already been addressed earlier. The “Man” is Strong’s #376, meaning a male person, a specific man, or a champion. To be “fenced” comes from Strong’s #4390 meaning to be full, in fullness, or to be accomplished. “Iron” is Strong’s #1270, easily recognizable as a metal substance, but also carrying implications of harshness, strength or oppression. “Staff” is Strong’s #6086, meaning a tree, a piece of wood, timber or stick. There is additional consideration of “staff” and “rod” in [Shepherds Need to Know about the Biblical Meaning of Rod](#). “Spear” is Strong’s #2595, clearly a spear or spearhead and the root word contains the further implications of to decline, incline, encamp, bend down, lay siege against. “Burned” is Strong’s #8313, a literal burning or burnt up, and “fire” Strong’s #784 represents fire or flames, a supernatural fire or even God’s wrath. “Same place” is Strong’s #7675, meaning seat or dwelling place.

My first impression was that this picture of thorns that can’t be touched by hands, but which must be dealt with by a man dealing with an iron rod/staff took me straight to Messiah Who will be returning with that iron rod, no longer the wooden staff of a shepherd, but the ruling King. The image that they would be utterly burned and destroyed in their place further matches with the image of the final days. Since King David had to deal with thorns, and it appears others throughout all time have as well, it does seem as though shepherds today would do well to understand as much as possible about the matter.

With the intent to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, I had checked to see where else these thorns appeared. As noted, the first instance seems to be in the Garden, when thorns first appeared as a result of the curse on the ground.

*And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed [is] the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat [of] it all the days of thy life; **Thorns also and thistles** shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou [art], and unto dust shalt thou return.*

Genesis 3: 17-19

As noted earlier, thorns are paired with thistles on several occasions. Thistles, Strong's #1863, which is noted to mean simply thistles, has a note of uncertain origin. The word is דַרְדַר transliterated as *dardar* and little seems to be known of it. TWOT listed it incorrectly as being used only once in Hosea 8:10, when it is actually used twice according to the Blue Letter Bible, in Hosea 10:8 and Genesis 3:18. AHLB offers an interesting note. The paleo Hebrew form is  and the commentary on this word is that it was thistles that were used by a shepherd to build a corral around the flock by night. The pictograph  is a door representing a moving back and forth. The  is the head of a man. Combined these mean "the back and forth movement of man". *A generation is one revolution of the family line. The Hebraic understanding of order is the continual cyclical process of life and death or renewal and destruction. This root can also have the meanings of circling around of something in a wide area or to cover a large area.*¹⁰

Thorns and thistles were the result of sin in the Garden, when it seems to me that there may be a little picture of substitutionary redemption in that the ground, from which man was formed, took the curse for "his sake." A 'like kind' redeemer bore the direct result of the sin. As a result of the presence of these thorns and thistles now coming from the ground, man could no longer bask in pleasure of the Garden and all that grew there, but instead would be forced to work to bring forth productive plant life in the general fields. So in effect, thorns made life difficult.

Hosea described thorns and thistles as "coming up on the altars" which seems again to be a result of the crookedness and sin of mankind.

***Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself;
according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars;
according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images.
Their heart is divided; now shall they be found faulty:
he shall break down their altars, he shall spoil their images.
For now they shall say, We have no king, because we feared not the LORD;
what then should a king do to us?
They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant:
thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field.
The inhabitants of Samaria shall fear because of the calves of Bethaven:
for the people thereof shall mourn over it, and the priests thereof that rejoiced on it,
for the glory thereof, because it is departed from it.
It shall be also carried unto Assyria for a present to king Jareb:
Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.
As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water.
The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed:
the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars;
and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.
O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood:
the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them.
It is in my desire that I should chastise them; and the people shall be gathered against them,
when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows.***

¹⁰ Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible; Benner, Jeff A.; 2005.

*And Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn;
 but I passed over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to ride;
 Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods.
**Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground:
 for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.**
 Ye have plowed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity; ye have eaten the fruit of lies:
 because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.
 Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled,
 as Shalman spoiled Betharbel in the day of battle:
 the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children.
 So shall Bethel do unto you because of your great wickedness:
 in a morning shall the king of Israel **utterly be cut off.***

Hosea 10:1-15

Though I cannot fully explore all the implications of this passage here, I will note that the people of Israel had once again fallen, and proved themselves to be an “empty vine,” a plant without the good fruit of YHWH, instead making their own fruit and their own altars which YHWH will tear down. I couldn’t help but see a connection again with David and his descendants as we know that Solomon ended up with a divided heart as is described here by Hosea.

In their failure to honor YHWH they have no king either and consider what a king could or would do to them. They made a false covenant that will result in judgment coming up like a poison in the furrows. I couldn’t help but consider that thorns coming up due to sin, and judgment coming up like a poison after the work of making a furrow are related.

Upon checking the meaning of the words here for judgment and hemlock I found that the words used were also used to describe the *root of bitterness* which I had just recently understood has to do with rejecting the Torah, rather than just the harboring of anger or a grudge as has been commonly taught. I have already started another study to deal with the *root of bitterness* and now see that it does indeed follow close on the heels of what I have seen here.

I am including more of the passage to include the acknowledgement that these words were NOT for only those present at the time, but even for those who were not physically present that day. The whole thing is again in the context of the covenant that our Abba has made with His people, though we have so often rebelled. Just as is true for David’s family so is it true for us. We are dependent on His mercy.

That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

***Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath;
 But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God,
 and also with him that is not here with us this day:
 (For ye know how we have dwelt in the land of Egypt;
 and how we came through the nations which ye passed by;
 And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold,
 which were among them:)***

***Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe,
whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God,
to go and serve the gods of these nations;***

lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood;

*And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart,
saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst:
The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy
shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him,
and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven.*

Deuteronomy 29:13-20

Sin led to the intrusion of thorns and thistles in the first place. Self-sufficiency and pride lead to judgment which involves thorns, thistles, a root of bitterness. Judah and Ephraim each had their own furrow, perhaps symbolic of their work. Here again, I see a picture of the whole House of Israel, divided in heart and in error; equal and opposite errors. Judah has kept Torah and missed Messiah Yeshua while Ephraim has lost Torah and held on to Messiah Yeshua through the church, which is quickly going down the same road of apostasy as our brothers have taken. Both have dug furrows of their own making and made their own fruit. Yet, our hope and confidence is in our Elohim who Himself confirmed His covenant with us.

In fact, I couldn't help but wonder if in fact, the addition of thorns (and thistles) might be another evidence of His mercy even from the beginning? Those of spiritual understanding often recognize that we do not tend to grow in our faith, humility, and dependence on Him during times of great ease, but more so in hardships. Perhaps in the introduction of "thorns" we are once again slowed down and thwarted in ways that He intends to cause us to look more fully toward Him.

Further exploration on the use of thorns led to this passage where the literal thorns are compared to people.

*But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you;
then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them **shall be pricks in your eyes,
and thorns in your sides**, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.*

Numbers 33:55

There is a doubling of image here; pricks and thorns representing a similar picture. But more importantly for our purposes at this time, we see that people who do not heed YHWH, the inhabitants of the land, are referred to as thorns. They reject His Torah and bear roots of bitterness that bring up bad fruit which we were warned would cause problems.

In the verse in question, David spoke of the thorns. Paul spoke of the thorn in his side, the messenger of satan. Both were shepherds to the people, caring for them, teaching, exhorting, delivering them.

*Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from
before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you,*

*and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes,
until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.*

Joshua 23:13

And so it proved to be:

*And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations,
there was given to me **a thorn in the flesh**, the messenger of Satan to buffet me,
lest I should be exalted above measure.*

2 Corinthians 12:7

Students of the Word had long debated just what this “thorn” was that Paul was given. I recall first coming to see the possible connection with those who are in opposition and do not honor YHWH as noted in the verse from Numbers. It seemed such an enlightenment to make this connection and see some validity of interpretation through the Scriptures themselves rather than personal conjecture. Some have concluded it was some kind of illness and some that the phrase “messenger of satan” sometimes translated as “angel of satan” must definitively be a demonic issue.

A demon is generally understood to be a fallen angel, a spirit being. An angel is by function a messenger. Even King David was called an angel. I do not see that this automatically implies a spiritual/demonic issue for Paul that has no physical or relationship connections. Especially in the context of studying thorns, I see again that there is a measure of grace given here, to avoid self-exaltation through the presence of some kind of opposition. The messenger of satan could as easily be a person who is hostile toward YHWH and thus, attending to the influence of the evil one, as much as it could be a demonic entity alone; either way, a thorn! So shepherds, hear the heart of our Abba. He does not want us to fall into the same poisonous furrows, and will provide thorns so that we are less likely to do so! As much as we struggle with difficult people, may we also find ourselves being humbled and made more like our Messiah in the process.

I have written before about the need for shepherds to discern between those who are tares or just immature wheat and those who are outright wolves. Now to that concern, I see I must add the need to identify thorns. Discernment and wisdom from YHWH are needed to help us serve appropriately; to cause us to know when to step in and when to step back, when to speak up and when to hold our peace.

And this brings us back around once more to the original observations: this picture of thorns that can't be touched by hands, but which must be dealt with by a man dealing with an iron rod/staff which took me straight to Messiah Who will be returning with that iron rod, no longer the wooden staff of a shepherd, but the ruling King; and the image that they would be utterly burned and destroyed in their place in the final days.

As one who has been called as an Undershepherd, I am quite aware of what it means to be dealing with thorns, tares, immature wheat and growing wheat...and the toll that it takes to do so. As has been true

with those I have spoken and consulted with over the years, we reluctant shepherds did not ask for this role but rather have attempted to honor the call of our Father to feed His sheep.

Being called into service as a shepherd to His people is often met with different reactions and understandings. It is a high honor and a privilege. In this life, it can be demanding and thankless. It carries little recognition and authority despite some believing otherwise. It often carries responsibility but no legal or practical authority to enforce what is understood as necessary for “right ruling” or correction and discipline. One can shepherd only with the mutual understanding of the call by all involved; leader and people. This is a high challenge, given the times in which we live, having been warned that people will become lovers of themselves, rebellious, slanderers, unwilling to listen to sound teaching and so forth. Dare I say that the thorns are multiplying till there are whole fields of them?

I think that my experience parallels that of many others as we have left behind our previous occupations/professions to answer His call though it may be a little more intense due to my clinical work with severely traumatized people that grew over into Set Apart Ministries. It is also true that many traumatized people just don't happen to have a formal diagnosis and are still present right along with the rest of the crowd in any given fellowship. So far, as I have grown in understanding in my faith I have gained in relationship with Messiah and a few trusted friends and in knowledge of the Word. I wouldn't trade this for anything! All Praise to Him! I have understood I am to be His Undershepherd, no longer a “maker of money.” I have been honored to stand in prayer with people in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health. I have had an opportunity to travel to a few locations around the US and Kenya to teach and encourage, and to Israel to study. I have had a few articles published internationally. I have also set aside my profession, financial stability, and credible reputation in the surrounding area professionally and within the local and statewide Christian community. I have suffered loss of friendship with many and damage to family relationships, in part due to Torah pursuance, because they regard it as foolishness at best and dangerous at worst.

While working with those most severely traumatized, I have been screamed at in name calling and obscenities, cursed, hit, kicked, cut, spit on, threatened with death many times --while trying to help wounded people who do not want what they truly need to recover. When in community with those less severely traumatized, more of the “normal” upsets of life, I have been slandered, libeled, threatened, accused of being controlling, of usurping a man's role, accused of being a witch and a murderer, a false teacher, of being hypocritical in holding others to a standard I do not honor myself, of making others into “clones” of myself. I have been told I expect too much and am too hard if I uphold standards. If I don't adhere to standards, the ensuing disorder falls on my doorstep as well.

Why do many home fellowship leaders/shepherds of Messianic communities quit?

It's all way more than we'd ever envisioned it would be!

Sometimes feeling inadequate or just overwhelmed by the needs and expectations of others. (*Oh, Abba! You must have called the wrong person for this!*) Were we able to better discern between tares, immature wheat, wolves and thorns I suspect the burden might be lighter. Surely we do have the

stubborn and stiff necked rebellious ones, sons of Belial, and thorns that Moshe and David spoke of. Surely they do vex us and are a scourge to us, but may they also be a mercy and a protection that we do not fall to presumptuous sin and pride, or get in the furrow with them! May the gentle rain of His teachings fall on us so that we produce good fruit and righteousness!

Oswald Chambers observed that if Messiah had judged the “success” of His ministry on earth by people’s reactions, it would certainly be considered a failure. Surely, if anyone is attempting to carry out the role of a shepherd for any kind of self-serving flattery or grandiosity they will not remain. Where is the benefit?

If anyone is seeking to be found without spot or blemish and ready when Messiah comes to enter in to His rest, I suppose this role is the perfect preparation. If one is able to yield to and draw from His strength and all seven aspects of His Spirit. If one is willing to spend their strength and life’s blood on serving a people who generally do not want to hear what is needed while also living “outside the camp,” of the greater body of traditional Christian believers, finding grace and deeper grace and deeper wells of His presence in order to do so surely this must be the attraction... to hear “well done, good and faithful servant. Enter in!”

All of this comes together as one explores the identity of the “thorns” and the “sons of Belial” mentioned in the initial verse. I picture the parable of the seeds as well. A group of thorns will choke out the Word. Ah; this picture makes even more sense now in context of other metaphors throughout the Word! Those who are in rebellion, those serving Belial, will choke those who are trying to grow in the Word especially if left unchecked. I do wonder about the difference between dealing with a single thorn verses a whole field of them. Perhaps it is easier to avoid a single thorn or to tear it out. But I am told by one with agricultural experience that a field that is overtaken with thorns can only be handled effectively by burning them off.

Shepherds need to discern between those who are thorns that can’t be touched by human hands, immature wheat, tares, and wolves. The necessary action –or inaction– will be different in each case. We need to understand how to proceed. Looking to the Word for guidance I observed several things. By the very nature of the word, thorns have to do with pricking or being cut off, and thistles are similar but also include a sense of encircling, as in the hedge of thorns a shepherd would create to protect the flock by night. The crown of thorns, a circle of them, on Messiah’s Head seems to me to have been a picture of the (temporary) victory the people—the sons of Belial—thought they’d accomplished. Yes, they were thorns, people who rejected His Word, the Living Word, born from the root of that bitterness. Yet He rose again and overcame them through His first appearance on earth and will entirely destroy them with fire on His return as King with the iron rod. What are we to do in the interim?

I have long appreciated Oswald Chambers as one who had insight and understanding into our need for growth in faith and humility. During the course of this study time, I came to a reading that is relevant.

This is a picture of the life we are to live as God's children—entering in by our Lord, who is the Door, not once for all, but every day, for everything. Is there trouble in the physical domain? Enter in by the Door and be saved. Trouble in mental matters?

Enter in and be saved.

A thousand and one things make up life as it is and in them all we have to learn to enter in by the Door. Entering in, in the name of Jesus[Yeshua] is the condition of daily salvation, not salvation from sin only, but a salvation that keeps us manifestly the Lord's sheep.

*Are you experiencing daily salvation, or are you shut out from Jesus Christ just now in your bodily life, in your mind, in your circumstances? Is there any fog, any darkness, any weariness, any trouble? **Every day there are things that seem to shut the way up, but you can always enter in by the Door and experience salvation. In the east it is the body of the Shepherd himself that is the door of the fold.***

We are apt to have the idea that salvation is a kind of watertight compartment and if we enter in all our liberty will be destroyed. That is not our Lords' conception. He says, "he shall go in and go out. "Are we entering in by the Door for our daily work or only at a devotional meeting? The going In and out is our Lord's picture of the freedom of a son. A servant cannot go in and out as he likes, but Jesus says. "No longer do I call you servants...but I have called you friends.

Nothing is closed to you once you enter in by the Door.¹¹

As those who honor Messiah Yeshua, we do need to enter in daily through Him as the Door. I saw the image of the thorn and the thistle, as described via the paleo Hebrew form of *dardar*, the man's head going back and forth through the door; the hedge of thistles surrounding the flock with the shepherd as the door. Going in and going out. Those who do honor Him can only truly enter in through relationship with Him. They cannot get in through the thistles or without the proper garments as in the parables relating to the Wedding feasts. We must go in and out daily, not just once in a while or when in great concern about something! (I am reminded of my one time pastor/supervisor who became alarmed when he learned that I'd asked for prayer. His view? I would only ask if I were in some kind of trouble or over my head. I saw it that it was wise to ask for prayer so that I WOULDN'T end up in some kind of trouble or over my head.)

Solomon, David's son, was chosen to succeed his father as king, and thus was put in the position of leading, shepherding the people. Soon after his appointment, he described a dream in which YHWH spoke with him. He was given permission to ask something of YHWH and showed humility in his response.

*Now o Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David but I am a little child. **I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of***

¹¹ Reading 148, Enter In By the Door, taken from the *My Utmost for His Highest Devotional Bible*: with relevant excerpts from the words of Oswald Chambers.

Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?

1 Kings 3: 6-9

So, a servant leader is IN THE MIDST of the people, not at their head and not at their feet. The leader needs to know how to go out and come in by the Door Yeshua, Who is also the ONLY One who can deal with thorns with His iron staff.

We will do well to heed the last words of David, the man after Yah's own heart, and the prophets.

*Now these are the last words of David. David the son of Jesse declares,
The man who was raised on high declares, The anointed of the God of Jacob,
And the sweet psalmist of Israel, "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue.
"The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me, 'He who rules over men righteously,
Who rules in the fear of God, Is as the light of the morning when the sun rises,
A morning without clouds, When the tender grass springs out of the earth,
Through sunshine after rain.'*

*"Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me, Ordered in all things, and secured; For all my salvation and all my desire, Will He not indeed make it grow?
"But **the worthless**, every one of them will be thrust away like **thorns**, Because **they cannot be taken in hand**; But **the man who touches them** Must be **armed with iron** and the **shaft of a spear**, And they will be completely **burned with fire in their place**."*

2 Samuel 23: 1-7 NASB

*And she brought forth a **man child**, who was to rule all nations with a **rod of iron**:
and her child was caught up unto God, and [to] his throne.*

Revelation 12:5

*His eyes [were] as a **flame of fire**, and on his head [were] many crowns;
and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.*

Revelation 19:12

*And out of his mouth goeth a **sharp sword**, that with it he should smite the nations:
and he shall rule them with a **rod of iron**: and he treadeth the winepress
of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*

Revelation 19:15

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Isaiah 55: 3-13 KJV

And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame:

and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day;

Isaiah 10: 17

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month:

and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

Revelation 22:2-4

The Tree of Life in the garden. The good rain of His Word. A righteous King and Shepherd.

Until then, may His shepherds learn all that is necessary to recognize the thorns and commend them to Him with His rod of iron.

No more thorns.

No more need for them. May it be so in our day!

Even so, come quickly Yeshua Messiah!

Abba, Father, You alone know all things and tell the end out of the beginning. You have created all of the heavens and earth for our benefit to learn of You and Your ways. We have seen the picture of Messiah Yeshua as our Good Shepherd and the use of His staff to protect and correct us, His sheep, that You have given to Him. We have known that we need to lean into You for understanding and strength, but as the days grow darker and thorns increase we see here that we must even more act on the need to go in and out through You alone. Now may we please learn all that we need to know to recognize

how we are to walk after Yeshua, shepherding and feeding His sheep right in the midst of them as He would direct, but also recognizing that when thorns overwhelm the land, that we must defer to Him and His Rod as He is the only One who can touch them and deal with them effectively.

We do want to be found spotless and without wrinkle when Messiah returns! We do want to be found faithful shepherds who do not run away. In our weakness, we bless Your Name for Your covenant with us, as with King David, and we look to the sure and certain hope that all things will be restored! We do look for the gentle rain of Your doctrine to fall on us and bring forth Your fruit of righteousness.

B'shem Yeshua haMaschiach, May it be so!!!