

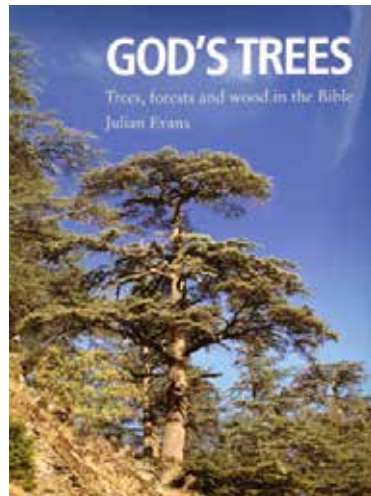
GOD'S TREES - Trees, Forests and Wood in the Bible

Julian Evans.

DayOne Publications, 2013.

Hardback. 208 pages. ISBN: 978-1-84625-410-9.

£20



This is the first authoritative publication to focus on *Trees, Forests and Wood in the Bible*. It includes stories of how they were used and sometimes abused, by early man. Written by Professor Julian Evans, former professor at Imperial College, London who is well known to Irish foresters from his many visits here to lecture on broadleaf species. He is the current President of the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) and Chair of the Forestry Commission's Expert Committee on Forest Science. He is an elder within the leadership team of his church in Alton.

There are many references to trees in the Bible and the story which is most familiar to us is probably the story of Adam and Eve and the forbidden fruit, the apple (*Malus domestica* (Borkh.)). However, the apple is not native to biblical lands and it seems that domestication of the species was much later than figs and olives. Therefore, Professor Evans assures us that Eve did not take an apple. We are not certain which fruit she was tempted by ... so after all those years of belief, this element of the story is firmly debunked! The tree that is mentioned most frequently in the Bible is the cedar of Lebanon and in this book we learn why King Solomon imported so much cedar for his temple. Like oak in these islands, the cedar was the largest and most common tree in the land of the Old and New Testament. We also learn that juniper was used in the floor of the temple.

Regarding Noah's Ark, we know little about the type of wood that was used in its construction. We can only speculate, but it appears that it was most likely the Mediterranean cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens* L.). We are given the approximate dimensions of the Ark which held the record as the largest ship ever built until the early 19th Century. Its construction was no doubt a monumental undertaking as it would have required hundreds of men and oxen to fell and haul the logs to the construction site and indeed as many more to shape and fit the planks and beams to ensure that the vessel was watertight.

The olive tree is mentioned in almost half of the books of the Bible and olive oil facilitated the smooth functioning of religious and social life in biblical times. It had a myriad of widely varying uses including lighting, cooking, flavouring, cleaning, healing and cosmetics. Incense, derived from the frankincense tree (*Boswellia sacra* Flueck.), was an important element of religious ceremonies. It is not native to Israel or Egypt but comes from the Horn of Africa. Its introduction in c. 1465 BC is the first recorded tree introduction. Another gift to the infant Jesus was myrrh. Even more precious than frankincense, myrrh comes from a large woody shrub of the semi-desert. There are frequent references to pine trees in the Bible. There are several pines which are native to the Mediterranean area but only one, Aleppo pine or Jerusalem pine (*Pinus halepensis* Miller) which is native to Israel. It has been widely used in afforestation and looks similar to our native Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris* L.).

Also mentioned frequently is palm. In Ireland, the palm sprays used in Palm Sunday religious ceremonies are generally sourced from whichever conifer is most readily available in the area, but in the bible a reference to palm meant the date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera* (L.)) or Doum palm (*Hyphaene thebaica* (L.) Mart.).

In the New Testament there are references to Christ's crucifixion beginning with the Garden of Gethsemane. It is not, however, clear what type of wood was used in the cross or the type of tree used for the crown of thorns, although the latter is believed to be the Christ-thorn (*Ziziphus spina-Christi* (L.) Desf.). A tree which is not unlike our holly, it sprouts a copious supply of large thorns at its base to prevent grazing by animals but there are smaller and fewer thorns higher up the stem.

At the end of this book, there is a very useful compendium outlining the trees named in the Bible and trees that the traveller can see when visiting the eastern Mediterranean region.

John Mc Loughlin

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