

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
3-27-24

Judges 12

The Men Of The Tribe Of Ephraim Are Angry With Jephthah – Verse 1

¹ The Ephraimite forces were called out, and they crossed over to Zaphon. They said to Jephthah, “Why did you go to fight the Ammonites without calling us to go with you? We’re going to burn down your house over your head.”

15:1 Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon, and did not call us to go with you: Israel had just won a great battle, but instead of joy, there was pettiness and quarreling. The tribe of Ephraim was angry and jealous that they were not invited to join in the fighting (although Jephthah said he had invited them). There is a tendency within all of us to not want to do a job unless we receive credit. It is evident that the people of the tribe of Ephraim were more concerned with getting the credit than with seeing a job done.

Jephthah Responds To The People Of The Tribe Of Ephraim – Verses 2-3

² Jephthah answered, “I and my people were engaged in a great struggle with the Ammonites, and although I called, you didn’t save me out of their hands. ³When I saw that you wouldn’t help, I took my life in my hands and crossed over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave me the victory over them. Now why have you come up today to fight me?”

15:2 The LORD delivered them into my hand: Jephthah’s idea was clear. God won a great victory through him when the Ephraimites stood by, though they had the opportunity to help. In this he pointed out the essentially unjust character of their complaint.

15:3 When I called you, you did not deliver me: The people of Ephraim here seem to be simply chronic complainers. When they had a chance to step out boldly for God they did not do it. Yet when the work was done and God was glorified, they complained that they didn’t get to participate.

The Gileadites (Led By Jephthah) Overwhelm The People Of The Tribe Of Ephraim – Verses 4-7

⁴ Jephthah then called together the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. The Gileadites struck them down because the Ephraimites had said, “You Gileadites are renegades from Ephraim and Manasseh.” ⁵The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, “Let me cross over,” the men of Gilead asked him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he replied, “No,” ⁶they said, “All right, say ‘Shibboleth.’” If he said, “Sibboleth,” because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed at that time. ⁷Jephthah led Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in a town in Gilead.

15:4-6 The insults of the Ephraimites enraged Jephthah, who called out his troops and killed 42,000 men from Ephraim. Jephthah usually spoke before he acted, but this time his revenge was swift. It

cost Israel dearly, and it might have been avoided. Insulting others and being jealous are not right responses when we feel left out. But seeking revenge for an insult is just as wrong, and very costly.

12:5-6 The men of the tribe of Ephraim caused Jephthah trouble just as they had Gideon (8: 1-3). Jephthah captured the fords of the Jordan, the boundary of Ephraim, and was able to defeat his countrymen as they crossed the river. He used a pronunciation test. Shibboleth is the word for “stream.” The Ephraimites pronounced “sh” as “s,” so Jephthah’s army could easily identify them.

12:6 The term shibboleth therefore came into the English language as something which determines which side you are on. In modern English usage a shibboleth is the same as an “acid test.” Today, there are certain true shibboleths in a person’s vocabulary. In Judges 12:6, you could know something about a person by how they said “Shibboleth.” Today when someone talks about Jesus, you can listen to what they say and learn something about them. You can listen as they speak about the Bible, and you know something about them. It is also true that as much as our dialect gives us away, so does our everyday speech. Others should be able to tell that we are Christians by the way we talk.

Minor Judges Ibzan And Elon – Verses 8-12

⁸ After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem led Israel. ⁹ He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He gave his daughters away in marriage to those outside his clan, and for his sons he brought in thirty young women as wives from outside his clan. Ibzan led Israel seven years. ¹⁰ Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem. ¹¹ After him, Elon the Zebulunite led Israel ten years. ¹² Then Elon died and was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.

12:8 Ibzan of Bethlehem: This does not seem to be the same city called “House of Bread” that David, son of Jesse would later make famous. “Beth-lehem is not to be identified with Bethlehem in Judah, which is usually written as Bethlehem-judah... The likelihood is that this Beth-lehem was the town in western Zebulun, about 10 miles north of Megiddo (Joshua 19:15).”

12:8-9 He had thirty sons. And he gave away thirty daughters in marriage: Ibzan practiced the traditional custom of making alliances through marriage and was wealthy and prestigious enough to have so many children and so many alliances through marriage.

12:11-12 Elon the Zebulunite: He was next in a succession of briefly-reigning judges. He is also from a different tribe from the past few judges from before him. God called leaders from various tribes, instead of from one tribe only.

The Judge Abdon – Verses 13-15

¹³ After him, Abdon son of Hillel, from Pirathon, led Israel. ¹⁴ He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys. He led Israel eight years. ¹⁵ Then Abdon son of Hillel died and was buried at Pirathon in Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

12:13-15 Abdon a judge of Israel for eight years. The account says that he was the son of Hillel the Pirathonite, and that he was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim. No mention is made of great public services rendered by him, but it is said that he had seventy sons and grandsons. So far as we can judge, he was placed in office as a wealthy elderly man, and performed the routine duties acceptably. Very likely his two next predecessors Ibzan and Elon were men of the same type.

12:13-15 A certain importance attaches to Abdon from the fact that he is the last judge mentioned in the continuous account (Judges 2:6 through 13:1) in the Book of Judges. After the account of him follows the statement that Israel was delivered into the hands of the Philistines forty years, and with that statement the continuous account closes and the series of personal stories begins--the stories of Samson and Micah.