

Imagine a beautiful spring day. ... A man is driving along in his Mustang convertible on a country road. ... The top is down... the sun is shining... and he is soaking up the scenery. ... Suddenly... from around the curve ahead... a car comes Barreling directly toward him - in *his* lane! ... He slams on the brakes and as the other car swerves past him... narrowly avoiding a collision... a woman driver from the other car screams at him... "*Pig! Pig!*" Enraged, the man yells back at her, "*Why don't you watch where you're going – Imbecile! Imbecile!*" ... Feeling a little instant gratification for answering her back... he drives around the curve and smacks right into a pig!

In this section of Scripture we will see that there are pigs around the corner for a certain tribe of Israelites – the Ephraimites. ... They become enraged and speak from their uninformed rage... to their own detriment.

(Now) In our passage last week... we saw that Jephthah had been used by the Lord to win a great victory against the Ammonites. ... But he promised God that he would dedicate to Him whatever greeted him at his door... upon his return from victory. ... This was an unnecessary vow. ... And his daughter greeted Jephthah... so she was needlessly dedicated to a life of service in the Temple... without being able to have children... and thereby unable to pass down Jephthah's inheritance. ... This brings us to chapter twelve. ... and we see that when it rains - it pours! ... Jephthah goes from one trauma to another.

Jephthah has risked his life in battle to defeat the Ammonites... he keeps his painful vow that he made to the Lord... and then... the Ephraimites suddenly show up to gripe... threaten... and insult. ... Instead of

congratulating - they criticize. ... Instead of thanking - they threaten to burn his house down. ... They are angry... jealous... envious... and proud – as peacocks!

Judges 12:1

Jephthah had already lost his household... now they announce their determination to burn down his physical house. ... In their jealousy and corrupt sense of self-importance the Ephraimites determined to destroy Israel's deliverer.

The Ephraimites are angry and jealous because of the victory and spoils their brother tribes received from the victory. ... This tribe had the exact same problem with Gideon (Judges 8:1-3). ... Gideon was from the western part of Manasseh and Jephthah was from the eastern section of Manasseh. Ephraim was extremely jealous of Manasseh... more than the other tribes... because both (Ephraim and Manasseh) were descendants of Joseph... They were close (like siblings)! They were brother tribes. Like a lot of families... they felt sibling rivalry and jealousy... to be superior over the other. ... In their anger and jealousy... they are armed for war against their brothers. ... This was a consistent pattern in the tribe of Ephraim.

- They were always happy to gather the spoils.
- They were quick to defend their rights and privileges.
- They had no taste for battle, yet, were always brave after the battle.
- Ephraimites were always ready to fight with their brother tribes, but not with their enemies.
- They were unwilling to accept their responsibilities.

The Ephraimites are a picture of many carnal, lazy, lukewarm Christians today who are...

- *content* to enjoy the blessings of the Lord,
- *complacent* in letting others confront the lost, witness, serve in the church, go to the mission field, serve on committees and boards, visit and invite others to church, and give to the Lord.
- *critical* and condemn those who are working and getting the job done.

One day D.L. Moody was approached by a woman who said, "*Mr. Moody, I don't like the way you preach the Gospel.*" Moody told her that he was always willing to learn and improve... and asked the woman what method she used. ... "*I don't have one,*" the woman replied. ... To which Moody immediately answered... "*Well then... I like the way I do it... better than the way you don't do it.*"

One of the greatest needs of a church today is to have godly believers... who encourage other believers... and edify the body of Christ. ... The Ephraimites demonstrate that when you feel over-looked... or left out from God's Kingdom work... insulting others and being jealous... is never an appropriate response.

This was a false accusation... which will be made very clear in the following verses. ... These critics do not hesitate to spin the truth... The real cause was that they were left out in the accolades of victory. ...

- 1) They had not helped during the long 18 years of oppression
- 2) They had been summoned... but they did not come

These fussers did not want to suffer the peril of battle... but they wanted the praise from battle. ... Gideon proved this fact of their character... We saw in Judges 8:3 that when he praised them... they immediately quit their complaining.

Gideon flattered them... he did not handle them God's way... and here they are again.

Judges 12:2-3

The arrogant Ephraimites condemn... criticize... and threaten Jephthah. What will he do? ... Jephthah does not take any complaining from these people. ... He rebukes them... "*We have been fighting the Ammonites. We called you for battle but you wouldn't come! Where were you when we needed you?*" ... When it came to carrying the load and sharing the burden... the Ephraimites fumbled the ball. ... If anyone had more reason to complain and quarrel... it would be Jephthah. ... He tells them... "*You were not responsible!*"

Does the Lord feel that way about you? ... Will the Lord say to you, "I called you, but you didn't come?" Are you a responsible person?

Let's clarify what a responsible Believer does.

- They use all of their energies to fulfill the expectations of those who are counting upon them. They give one hundred percent.
- They complete a task so it will endure testing. They do the job right.
- They realize the importance of the task assigned to them. They are not apathetic toward their assignment.

What are some of your responsibilities as a Christian?

- Get the Gospel out to all the nations. Matthew 28:19
- Love one another. John 13:34
- Keep the Lord's commandments. John 14:15
- Study to show yourself approved unto God. 2 Timothy 2:15
- Occupy (constantly keep at it) until the Lord comes. Luke 19:13
- Do not forsake the assembly of believers. Go to church. Hebrews 10:25
- Lay aside pride and consider other as more important than yourself (Phil. 2:1-11)

Pride nearly always causes division... contention... and strife. ... An evil pride exalts a person above others... as though he were better than others. This attitude causes division between that person... and those he considers to be underneath him. ... Pride caused a civil war within Israel.

Judges 12:4

The term - "fugitives" - is surely intended to touch a sore spot in Jephthah's own experience... generalizing his own painful personal experience as an outcast from his Gileadite countrymen.

Historically... Gilead was a group of families... that made a clan. They were - in part - from the tribe of Manasseh. ... But the Ephraimites call this clan a "mixed stock." "Fugitives ... in the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh..." was a slam. It was an accusation that they were half-breeds... half Ephraimite and half Manassites. ... It also claims that they were rejects... squatters... scum... on the land with no rights to territory. They are a clan of half-

breeds from two different tribes. “*You don’t even have the right to be on this land!*” ... Well! Them’s is fight’n words! ... (As my Southern relatives would say...) ... When Ephraim began flinging racial slurs... Jephthah had enough... and decides to call their bluff... and teach them a lesson. ... He responds by striking... and striking them hard! ... The bullies on the block had met their match.

Judges 12:5-6

The narrator seems to be satisfied that the slaughter of 42,000 from the proud tribe is appropriate punishment for the Ephraimites’ egomania.

Jephthah had the Ephraimites on the run. ... An ironic situation has developed. ... They had called Jephthah a fugitive... and now they are the fugitives. ... They had swarmed over the Jordan to burn Jephthah's house and now they have to sneak back. ... They are like a whipped dog with its tail beneath its legs.

The Gileadites devised a test to catch the Ephraimites... using an insignificant word. (Shibboleth”) ... It means “a flowing stream”... and it was difficult for outsiders to pronounce correctly.... In modern English usage... “Shibboleth” may refer to words... expressions... ideas... or beliefs... used by “insiders” to detect “outsiders.” ... Here in Oregon our “Shibboleth” is to ask someone to pronounce the name of the river... that runs through both Eugene and Portland... (If they say Will-a-mette... then we know they are not locals...) ... It is how we can tell someone is fresh off the boat from California.

We have our “Shibboleth” for determining someone is from Canada... or Minnesota... what is it...? (“I’ll be there in a boat 10 minutes...”) ...And I won’t embarrass the Johnsons by mentioning our “Shibboleth” that tells us someone is from New England...

But let me pull over... and “pack the ka” for second... to make a very important point. ... As the Ephraimites were identified by their speech... we too as believers need to be identified by our words and speech.

Psalm 37:30 (ESV)

The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice.

Proverbs 10:11 (ESV)

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

James 3:8-11 (ESV)

⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. ¹¹ Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?

Proverbs 31:26 (ESV)

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

Our words are powerful... impacting lives for good or bad. Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

Job 6:25 (ESV)

How forceful are upright words! But what does reproof from you reprove?

Proverbs 16:24 (ESV)

Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

Proverbs 25:11 (ESV)

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

Because our words are so powerful... the Bible gives us several warnings and commands.

Matthew 12:36-37 (ESV)

³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Ephesians 4:31 (ESV)

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

As the Ephraimites were identified by their “Shibboleth...” ... You and I... as believers... have our own “Shibboleth...” We need to be identified by our words and speech.

Judges 12:7

Ammon is subdued. ... But there is the grave of Jephthah's only child.
...And there are the lifeless forms of once-cocky Ephraimite militia.
...Whether from the excessive zeal we saw in Jephthah's foolish vow ... or stubborn pride that we saw in the Ephraimites ... tragedy overshadows the salvation Yahweh gave. ... I would wager that the writer meant to paint it so. ... I think he wants us to see Yahweh's deliverance blemished by human foolishness and human arrogance. ... It is as if even the winners can't have a clean win. ...We have salvation here but a marred salvation.

The writer is suggesting that if we seek a perfect salvation... we will have to look to One greater than Jephthah. ... The writer of Judges seems intent on stressing this imperfection in the salvation that comes through the judges. ... And the next three judges... are treated as though they are inconsequential. The writer doesn't have much at all to say about them.

Judges 12:8-15

All the judges listed here at the end of Judges 12 served short terms... and we are led to believe that they were non-productive. Instead of listing any of their accomplishments... the most we get are the signs of prestige and honors. ... We see the privileges of their office... and not the performance of their office.

However... the lack of information that we are given about these important men... can prove instructive. ... A passage like this underscores the selectivity of God's word. ... We often crave more detail when we read God's Word... Here we might wish to have more flesh on the bones of Ibzan... Elon... and Abdon's lives. ... We have no stirring deeds that are recorded... no gripping stories... no miracles... unless Ibzan's having thirty sons and thirty daughters and apparently retaining his sanity qualifies as a miracle. ... We might wish to have stories for them... as for Deborah or Gideon or Jephthah. But we don't. ... This does not necessarily mean there were no stories to tell. ... It means only that the Bible has not told them.

We must beware of thinking that Ibzan and Company were obscure or unimportant. Hardly. Ibzan's numerous sons and daughters and the marriage network he arranged show he was a man of social stature and

political clout. ...The same goes for Abdon. ... Yet the Bible does not elect to give us more biography.

We don't know why the Bible tells us so little about Ibzan... but by telling us so little about Ibzan (and Elon and Abdon) the Bible tells us a lot about the Bible! ... It tells us that its purpose is not to tell us about every Ibzan...

Elon... and Abdon. ... The Bible is saying that its focus is not on man's life but on God's action. ... The Bible is theo-centric. That does not mean that man does not count but that man is not the center.

Even though Gideon... for example... may receive three chapters... the writer's purpose is not to relate Gideon's eventful life (not even his problems... struggles... victories... or failures in themselves)... but to depict Yahweh's saving activity. ... For this reason I question the validity of much biographical preaching and Bible studies billed as character studies of biblical figures. ... Almost by their very nature... by their chosen starting points... such efforts begin by looking in the wrong direction. It is as if Scripture cries, 'Behold your God!'... and we reply... 'Thank you, but we have found something more interesting to us.' ... So... if a little frustration over Ibzan and associates makes us aware of this danger... they will not have lived in vain.

There is something else... that is also instructive about these incognito characters. They highlight for us... the perplexity of God's Own providence. ... The story of Jephthah... who has but one child and becomes... apparently... childless... is sandwiched between Jair with his thirty sons and Ibzan with a total of sixty children. ... Abdon's total of

seventy descendants also emphasizes the contrast. ... Many have noted this striking difference. Matthew Henry put it succinctly:

What a difference was there between Ibzan's family and that of his immediate predecessor Jephthah! Ibzan has sixty children and all married, Jephthah but one, a daughter, that dies or lives unmarried. Some are increased, others are diminished: both are the Lord's doing.

Once we see this we almost automatically ask, 'Why?' Why does God give to one and withhold from another? Why does Yahweh give and take away? Why does he order our affairs with such differences? We cheer the providence of God when the angel warns Joseph and the child Jesus escapes Herod's clutches (Matt. 2:13-15). But what about the other toddlers in Bethlehem? Why didn't God spare them from Herod's butchers (Matt. 2:16)? Could not the God who spared Jesus have also shielded these from the sword? If the king's heart really is in the hand of the Lord (cf. Prov. 21:1), why didn't he give Herod a fatal coronary for Epiphany?

Or there is Acts 12. Peter, chained in prison, was soon to face the axe of Herod Agrippa. The very night before Death Day, an angel of the Lord set Peter free (Acts 12:6-11). Such a narrow escape! Such a marvelous providence! Such an answer to the church's prayers – the folks at the prayer meeting couldn't even believe it (vv. 5, 12-17)! But – same chapter – what about James? You know, the brother of John. Agrippa's sword dispensed with him (vv. 1-2). Why does James perish while Peter enjoys a miracle? Could not the God who rescued Peter from Agrippa's chains have delivered James from his sword? There it is again, side by side: marvelous providence and mysterious providence. How anyone could think God is boring is beyond me.

Jephthah and Ibzan, the toddlers and the Christ child, James and Peter – repeatedly we face this perplexity. We cannot claim to know why God so works (that does not mean we cannot ask 'why?'). We can only bow before the One whose understanding is unsearchable (Isa. 40:28) and confess that though it is unsearchable it nevertheless must be understanding. We can, however, avoid foolish responses to this enigma – like imagining that if the parents of the Bethlehem toddlers had prayed more fervently, or if James had had stronger faith, God would have preserved them. And we can keep from inflicting such nonsense on others. We don't like to be without an explanation. But faith is willing, if need be, to be baffled, to bow and worship in the dark. That is the witness of Jephthah and Ibzan.

Before you ask “Why, Lord, why?” remember this, from Oswald Chambers:

“If you are going to be used by God, He will take you through a multitude of experiences that are not meant for you at all, they are meant to make you useful in His hands, and to enable you to understand what transpires in other souls so that you will never be surprised at what you come across.”

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Next week we will come to the judge who is perhaps the most famous of them all – Sampson!