

CHAPTER TWELVE

Ephraimites Slain by Jephthah 12:1-6

And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire.

2 And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands.

3 And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the Lord delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?

4 Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.

5 And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the

men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;

6 Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.

1. What was the ground of the complaint? 12:1

They were probably wanting spoils. The children of Ephraim had been blessed throughout much of Israel's history. Jacob had adopted Ephraim as one of his sons and given the descendants of Ephraim the status of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. When he pronounced his blessings on his twelve sons, he prophesied that Ephraim would be like a fruitful bough. Joshua, the first leader of the people of Israel in the Promised Land, was from this tribe; and in many ways they had taken a place of leadership. When Jephthah arose and delivered the Israelites from the oppressing Ammonites, these Ephraimites probably felt they had not been given proper opportunity to assume the role of leader.

2. When had Jephthah called the men of Ephraim? 12:2

Since the children of Ephraim said that Jephthah had not called them and Jephthah said he had called them, two different times of calling must have occurred. Probably Jephthah had given indication earlier that the Ammonites were oppressing the Gileadites. Nothing had been done about it, however, until the enemies from the east crossed Jordan and entered into the territory belonging to the tribes who lived west of the Jordan. Even then, the western tribes had not been able to provide proper leadership. In their desperation, they came to Jephthah and asked him to take the place of leadership. Jephthah had marched boldly ahead, and God had used him mightily.

3. *What attitude did the men of Ephraim take toward the Gileadites? 12:4*

The Ephraimites had called the Gileadites fugitives of Ephraim. They indicated they were like unwelcome foreigners among the Ephraimites and the Manassites. Such a description would be used only of those who were regarded as inferior, and this must have aroused animosity among the Gileadites.

4. *Why did the men of Ephraim deny their identity? 12:5*

After the Gileadites took possession of the fords of the Jordan, the Ephraimites were afraid to reveal their true identity. As these warriors began to filter back to their land on the west side of the Jordan after having fought in Gilead on the east of Jordan, they were accosted by the Gileadites who controlled the crossings of the Jordan. It was then that the Gileadites asked for proper

identification of these returning soldiers. When they asked one if he were an Ephraimite, he denied it because he was afraid for his life.

5. *Why were they not able to pronounce the word? 12:6*

Their speech organs were shaped by usage so as to prevent proper pronunciation. After pronouncing a word in a certain way a person becomes so accustomed to this pronunciation that he is unable to pronounce it differently. Such habits of speech become very deeply entrenched, and it is possible to identify a person's homeland by listening to his speech. During the trial of Jesus, those who identified Peter as one of His disciples said, "Thy speech maketh thee known" (Matthew 26:73). In other accounts of Peter's denials he was identified as a Galilean. Quite evidently, the speech habits of those in Galilee were different from those in Judea. It is possible even today to identify people from different localities by the way which they speak.

Jephthah's death 12:7

7 And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon Judged Israel 12:8-15

8 And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

9 And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years.

10 Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem.

11 And after him Elon, a Zebulunite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years.

12 And Elon the Zebulunite died, and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.

13 And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel.

14 And he had forty sons and thirty nephews, that rode on threescore and ten ass colts: and he judged Israel eight years.

15 And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites.

6, Who was Ibzan? 12:8

Ibzan was the ninth judge of Israel. He is identified as having been from Bethlehem, and Josephus says in his *Antiquities of the Jews* that he was of the tribe of Judah and from the city of Bethlehem (V, vii, 13) . It is not certain that this judge was from the tribe of Judah since no definite note is made to this effect. As a matter of fact, it seems he was probably from the tribe of Zebulun in the North. Elon, who is mentioned as the next judge, was a man of the North. A town by the name of Bethlehem is found in Zebulun in the North. The Bethlehem

in Judea is identified in some of the later chapters of Judges. In these later references the southern town of Bethlehem is called Bethlehem-judah (19:1, 2).

7. *What state of affairs was indicated?* 12:9

Prosperity was apparent. Ibzan did nothing worthy of particular notice as far as any act of deliverance for Israel is concerned. He was blessed with thirty sons and thirty daughters, and he lived to arrange marriages for his children. Specific mention is made of his sending abroad to find wives for his sons. Josephus said he also arranged for the marriages of his daughters (*Ibid.*).

8. *Who was Elon?* 12:11

Eton is positively identified as being a member of the tribe of Zebulun. Like Ibzan, he did nothing worthy of mention, and no memorial was perpetuated in his name. His judgeship was ten years in length, and he was buried in Aijalon.

9. *Where was Aijalon?* 12:12

Aijalon is located by the Scriptures within the borders of the land given to the tribe of Zebulun. Another place by the name of Aijalon was in the territory allotted to the tribe of Dan (Joshua 19:42). Later this location was designated a Levitical city (Joshua 21:24) and was occupied by the descendants of Kohath (I Chronicles 6:69). Here Joshua prayed for the moon to stand over the valley (Joshua 10:12). The town in the territory assigned to the tribe of Zebulun is unknown. The only mention of it is made here in reference to the judgeship of Elon.

10. *Who was Abdon?* 12:13

Abdon is described as being the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite. Pirathon is located within the land assigned to the tribe of Ephraim. Josephus says he was "ordained the supreme governor after Helon" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, VII, v, 15). Public affairs were peaceable in his days as well

as in the days of his predecessors. As a result

of the security which he found, no glorious action of deliverance is attributed to him. All his people seemed to be skillful in riding horses, and his forty sons and thirty nephews are mentioned as having each possessed an ass colt on which he might ride. His judgeship was eight years in length.

11. *Where was Pirathon? 12:15*

Many claims for identification with Pirathon are made for different places in Palestine. One of David's chief captains, Benaiah, was from this place (II Samuel 23:30, I Chronicles 11:31, 27:14) . W. Ewing in his article on "Pirathon" in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* concludes that the place should be identified with *Fer'ata*, a place about six miles south and west of Shechem. Others conclude that it may have been a site in Benjamin since Abdon was from Benjamin and his family is known as a Benjamite (I Chronicles 8:23, 30, and 9:36). A place known as Pharathon was fortified by Baccahides (I Maccabees 9:50).

12. *Where was the mount of the Amalekites? 12:15*

The Amalekites were nomadic peoples. They were the first to attack Israel when Israel was making her way out of Egypt (Exodus 17). At that time God foretold their ultimate destruction. They were the people whom Saul, Israel's first king, was told to destroy (I Samuel 15). At the time of the judges they were living among the Israelites and had evidently settled in a place long enough for the locale to be called the mount of the Amalekites.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 12

1. What word did Jephthah use to identify the Ephraimites?
2. What was the name of the river whose passages Jephthah seized?

STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

3. How many men of Ephraim were killed?
4. What was the name of the judge who succeeded Jephthah?
5. In what city was his home?
6. Of what tribe was he a member?
7. Who was the next judge?
8. Of what tribe was he a member?
9. Who was the next judge?
10. How long did he judge?