

Judges 12

Verses 1 - 6

Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, “Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon without calling us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you.”² Jephthah said to them, “I and my people were at great strife with the sons of Ammon; when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand.³ When I saw that you would not deliver *me*, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the sons of Ammon, and the Lord gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?”⁴ Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, “You are fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim *and* in the midst of Manasseh.”⁵ The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan opposite Ephraim. And it happened when *any of* the fugitives of Ephraim said, “Let me cross over,” the men of Gilead would say to him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he said, “No,”⁶ then they would say to him, “Say now, ‘Shibboleth.’” But he said, “Sibboleth,” for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan. Thus there fell at that time 42,000 of Ephraim.

Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, “Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon without calling us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you.”

Ephraim had confronted Gideon in the same way.

See Judges 8:1-3

Then the men of Ephraim said to Gideon, “What is this thing *that* you have done to us, not calling upon us when you went to fight against Midian?” And they quarreled with him vehemently.² But he said to them, “What have I done now in comparison with you? Is the gleaning *of the grapes* of Ephraim not better than the vintage of Abiezer?³ God has handed over to you the leaders of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; and what was I able to do in comparison with you?” Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.

Gideon was late in asking for Ephraim’s help but he was diplomatic and gave Ephraim credit for accomplishing more than he had done.

² Jephthah said to them, “I and my people were at great strife with the sons of Ammon; when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand. ³ When I saw that you would not deliver *me*, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the sons of Ammon, and the Lord gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?

Jephthah had asked Ephraim for help but they were unwilling to help him at that time. Then when Jephthah won the victory without them they were upset and ready to war against their fellow Israelites.

⁴ Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, “You are fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and in the midst of Manasseh.”

Jephthah led a group of outcasts that had come from a number of tribes. Some had left Ephraim as fugitives and were now living in Gilead and Manasseh.

This saying was an insult to everyone in Gilead because it inferred that everyone in Gilead was like Jephthah and his group of discontents and outlaws. This insult inspired the men of Gilead to defeat the men of Ephraim.

⁵ The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan opposite Ephraim. And it happened when *any of the fugitives of Ephraim* said, “Let me cross over,” the men of Gilead would say to him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he said, “No,” ⁶ then they would say to him, “Say now, ‘Shibboleth.’” But he said, “Sibboleth,” for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan. Thus there fell at that time 42,000 of Ephraim.

God gave Jephthah a great victory over Ephraim but those who survived the battle attempted to flee back to Ephraim.

However the Gileadites took the fords (shallow areas) of the Jordan and used a linguistic test to identify the Ephraimites. The men of Ephraim were unable to pronounce the "sh" sound and were seized and put to death.

42,000 men died. That is a staggering number of men for one tribe to lose.

The Dutch underground was able to screen out German spies by asking them to pronounce the name of the Dutch city Sheveningen.

Verse 7

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

Jephthah died in 1094 BC

See chart 1205

Chapter	Event/Leader	Time	Oppressed	Peace	As leader
1	Taking Canaan	1375			
2	A new generation	1375 - 1350			
3	Othniel	1350 - 1302	8	40	
3	Ehud	1302 - 1204	18	80	
3	Shamgar				
4 - 5	Deborah	1204 - 1144	20	40	
6 - 8	Gideon	1191 - 1144	7	40	
9	Abimelek	1144 - 1141			3
10	Tola	1141 - 1118			23
10	Jair	1118 - 1096			22
10 - 12	Jephthah	1118 - 1094	18		6
12	Ibzan	1094 - 1087			7
12	Elon	1087 - 1078			10
12	Abdon	1077 - 1070			8
13 - 16	Samson	1118 - 1078	40		20

As a judge Jephthah defeated the Ammonites but he also punished Ephraim for their prideful attitude

The City of Shiloh (home of the tabernacle in Ephraim) will be destroyed in 1070 BC.

See Jeremiah 7:12

¹² “But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the beginning, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.

This took place 24 years after this war in which Ephraim lost 42,000 men.

God may have used this event to weaken Ephraim so the Philistines could overtake the city of Shiloh.

God did this because Israel had become so wicked.

Verses 8 - 10

Now Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel after him. ⁹ He had thirty sons, and thirty daughters *whom* he gave in marriage outside *the family*, and he brought in thirty daughters from outside for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. ¹⁰ Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.

Now Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel after him.

Judge # 9 Ibzan 1094 – 1087

⁹ He had thirty sons, and thirty daughters *whom* he gave in marriage outside *the family*, and he brought in thirty daughters from outside for his sons

How many wives would be required to have 60 kids? Maybe 15 to 20.

It seems that some of these Judges must have been very wealthy men. Jacob was a very wealthy man and he only had 4 wives and 12 kids.

No specific reason is given for him seeking spouses for his sixty offspring from outside the family. It would be interesting to know if this was becoming more common among the Jews or if this was an anomaly.

Verses 11 - 12

¹¹ Now Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel after him; and he judged Israel ten years. ¹² Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.

Judge # 10 ELON 1087 to 1078 BC

The vocalized reading of Elon's burial place is identical with the name of the judge.

The place may have been named after him.

Verses 13 - 15

¹³ Now Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel after him. ¹⁴ He had forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy donkeys; and he judged Israel eight years. ¹⁵ Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

¹³ Now Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel after him.

Judge # 11 ABDON 1077 to 1071

Pirathon is in the territory of Ephraim.

See map 1210



Pirathon was about 6 miles southwest of Shechem.

¹⁴ He had forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy donkeys; and he judged Israel eight years.

If he had 40 sons how many daughters did he likely have?

How many wives did he have?

Again, a very wealthy man with a huge family was a Judge of Israel.

Apparently the concept of one man and one woman was not popular at that time.

Didn't Jesus say that the concept of 1 man and 1 woman started at the beginning of creation?

See Matt. 19:3-6

³ **Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason *at all*?"** ⁴ **And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning made them male and female,** ⁵ **and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become **one flesh**'?** ⁶ **So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no person is to separate."** ⁷ **They *said to Him, "Why, then, did Moses command to give *her* a certificate of divorce and send her away?"** ⁸ **He *said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.** ⁹ **And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."**

Now the context of this verse is talking about divorce but the implication of verse 5 goes beyond that subject matter.

Is it possible for one man and 30 wives to be one flesh?

But someone will say, but it was just a cultural thing to think this way at that time. Exactly, it was a cultural thing not a biblical thing.

In any case, God had to look past a lot of ignorance and sin in order to bring each one of us into a relationship with Him. It seems that God's grace was actively at work all through the Old Testament.