

## EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

### Message #18

### Judges 12:1-15

I read of an arrogant young man who wanted to impress a young lady who wasn't impressed with him because of his arrogance. In the course of his boastful conversation, he told the girl that he could trace his historical roots back to royalty. The young woman, who was already fed up with him, said "I'll bet you can and I'll also bet that your ancestor was King Kong."

Pride is a terrible sin that God hates. God says seven things are an abomination to Him; and at the top of the list is pride, a haughty look (Proverbs 6:17). A couple of chapters later in Proverbs 8 we read "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way, and the perverted mouth I hate" (Proverbs 8:13). God hates pride. In fact, according to Proverbs 29:23 "a man's pride will bring him low."

When you have pride you have jealousy and envy. In Galatians 5:20, jealousy and envy sit in a flesh sin context of strife, disputes, dissensions, outbursts of anger and factions. God will not bless proud and arrogant people. In fact, jealousy and envy can ruin your life; it did ruin the blessings of God for Israel.

The final years of Jephthah's life were not really happy years. This was partly due to his own stupidity in not knowing God's Word and it was also partly due to a bunch of proud and arrogant and jealous brothers from the tribe of Ephraim.

### **WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE AN INFLATED AND ARROGANT OPINION OF THEMSELVES, THEY ARE HEADING TO MAJOR DISASTER.**

Just like Proverbs 16:18 says "Pride goes before destruction." Now the Ephraimites were known to be big proud talkers. They liked to shoot off their mouths in a proud, arrogant way. We may remember that they had complained to Gideon (Judges 8:1ff) and Gideon gave them a soft answer and calmed them down. But Jephthah is not Gideon. You march up to him and arrogantly start complaining and he will do something about it.

### **FACT #1 – Ephraim verbally confronts Jephthah. 12:1**

Now Ephraim was a proud tribe. They wanted to be honored. They always wanted to be "top dog." We may recall that this was the tribe that hassled Gideon because he didn't call them to fight the Midianites (Judges 8:1).

They were big talkers, who wanted the limelight. They wanted to be stroked and coddled and appeased. Ephraim types are whiners and complainers. They really don't want to fight the battle, they want to complain and talk. But they are making a big mistake here.

Ephraim is jealous of the great victory Jephthah has experienced over the Ammonites; and they are mad because Jephthah never called them to fight the Ammonites, and they are mad that he got the job done himself. So they crossed the Jordan and they ran into Jephthah at Zaphon, which was a city near the Jordan.

A couple of weeks ago we cancelled our men's prayer breakfast, and one of the men who is a very hard worker in the church said humorously that it was a shame, because he intended to come to that breakfast. He was talking like an Ephraimite. He was being funny, but there was nothing funny about what is happening here.

Truth is all of us have seen Ephraim types a time or two at church. Paul knew about them and saw them in the Philippian church (2:3). Ephraim types talk big. They talk like they want in on the action. That is until you call them to the action.

George Bush in his commentary on Judges says that "The greatest boasters and loudest pretenders are usually the greatest cowards" (*Notes Critical and Practical on the Book of Judges*, pp. 168-169).

Ephraim types are the kinds of people who show up after the work is done and want to know why you didn't call them. They are upset in their delusional world because had you called them, they wouldn't have helped anyway. Ephraim types are jealous and proud and they can cause problems.

Unfortunately in almost every church there are a few Ephraimites who don't fight the battle the rest of the church fights. They are not on the front lines defending the TCBC warfare or the grace of God. They sit at home and don't get involved in much of anything and then they whine and complain about the church. There are many of you who are on the front lines of defending and supporting everything we do. You are part of the warfare and you do your part and you are good soldiers. But there are always some who are just like these whining and sniveling Ephraimites. All they do is criticize.

This time, however, the Ephraimites are crossing a real line and they are making a huge mistake. They are threatening the wrong guy. Jephthah is not the kind of guy you want to threaten. According to **verse 1**, they make a threat that since you went and fought without us, we are going "to burn down your house." One commentator said this threat is as ridiculous as Don Knotts threatening Clint Eastwood.

Sometimes you will hear someone say "well if someone broke into my house I just don't know if I could shoot them." Well you wouldn't hear Jephthah say that, because he would say you want to harm my house or my family "I will literally kill you," which he is literally about to do.

Jephthah is the wrong guy to threaten that you are going to burn down his house. He is in no mood to be threatened when he has just come off a major military victory, and when he has just sacrificed his own daughter.

Furthermore, we may recall that he had been a leader of a bunch of criminal types who are used to fighting (11:3). You don't threaten an "Al Capone" type, especially one who is right with God. If you threaten this kind of man, you are in for serious trouble.

**FACT #2** – Jephthah verbally responds to the Ephraimites. **12:2-3**

There are five verbal responses:

**Response #1** - I and my people were fighting a great war with the Ammonites. **12:2a**

The implication is, he didn't have time to baby sit Ephraim or cater to their whims. I was on the front lines of battle and I didn't have time to come hold your hand.

**Response #2** - I did call you to fight and you never showed up. **12:2b**

This is intriguing because it does show that Ephraim was shading the truth. Jephthah apparently had asked them to come and help fight but they didn't do one thing to help him.

What is admirable about Jephthah is that he did not initially bring this up when he met them. He could have said, "Where were you cowards?" "How come you didn't come and help us when we asked you?"

Jephthah was apparently very careful about what he would say to people, since he had made that vow. He was rejoicing in the fact that God had given him victory. So he did not rub in their faces the fact that they hadn't shown up to fight.

Learn a very important lesson; some people can talk a really good game, but they don't play. Some learn how to put a spin on things that isn't completely true, in order to make themselves look good.

This is why a wise person must always search out the whole truth and get all of the facts.

**Response #3** - I took my own life into my own hands and we went and fought without you. **12:3a**

Jephthah says, our lives were being threatened and we were not going to sit idly by and hope you would show up to protect us. We fought ourselves. We had a job to do for God and we did it.

**Response #4** - God gave us the victory. **12:3b**

Jephthah gives all of the praise to God for this great victory. They should be praising God for all He has done. Instead, they are jealous and mad. They are not focused on God, they are focused on themselves.

**Response #5** - Why have you come to fight me? **12:3c**

Jephthah was not their enemy, he was their brother. They wanted to fight their own brother because they were jealous. J. Vernon McGee said that whenever he found someone who was opposing the preacher all of the time, he suspected that jealousy was behind it (*Judges*, p. 73).

Haven't we seen this ourselves? You are on the move getting things done for God, and some whiner and complainer verbally attacks you and your ministry. That is what happens here.

**FACT #3** – Jephthah physically responds to the Ephraimites. **12:4-6**

Jephthah says, you boys want to fight, I'll accommodate you. They had just come face to face with a man who would call their bluff. Jephthah is in no mood to play games with these boys. God had used him in a major way and his own daughter had been sacrificed because he was a man true to his word. They had just picked a fight with the wrong guy.

The Ephraimites were much better at talking and complaining than they were fighting. They are about to learn they were no match for Jephthah and his men.

**Reaction #1** - Jephthah gathered his men and fought and defeated Ephraim. **12:4**

The Ephraimites were degrading. They said that the Gileadites were nothing more than fugitives from Ephraim. This was not true. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh had been given their land by Moses and Joshua (Num. 32; Josh. 22). They were not fugitives from Ephraim and Manasseh. In other words, they were insulting them. However, this is the wrong group to insult. There is an old saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." Well Ephraim's words did hurt them.

**Reaction #2** - Gilead captured all key land areas. **12:5**

Jephthah knew that they would have to cross the Jordan to get back home, so he stationed his trained military at key fording areas. Now here is the thing. Jephthah has already won the victory. Ephraim is on the run and they want to go home. But Jephthah will not let any one of them off the hook.

**Reaction #3** - Gilead came up with a password test to destroy more Ephraimites. **12:6**

To determine whether one were a Gileadite or an Ephraimite, he came up with a little verbal password test. When someone came and wanted to cross the Jordan, they would ask them if they were an Ephraimite and naturally they would say "no." So they would ask them to say the word "Shibboleth" which in Hebrew means flowing stream. The Ephraimites spoke a different dialect and they could not accurately pronounce the two "sh" consonants together and they would say "Sibboleth."

There are some phonetic sounds that we have in America that are difficult for some others to pronounce. For example, the "th" sound is very difficult for some Europeans and Iranians. Dr. Bush said that he knew of some German Jews who could not pronounce the "th" sound even when reading the Hebrew Bible. Bereshith ("in the beginning") became "bereshiss."

I went to school with a guy from Boston and we would get laughing because his dialect would add the consonant "r" when there wasn't one in the word. I would say to him, say "idea."

He would say “idear.” We would laugh because he could not say it. That is the same kind of thing that was happening here.

**This is so amazing because it was their proud tongue that got the Ephraimites their delusional elevation and it would be their tongue that would now get them their real execution.**

It is no wonder that James says “the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity,” that which is full of “deadly poison” (James 3:6-8). God gave Jephthah an amazing victory and in the end, 42,000 Ephraimites were killed. Why? Why did this all happen? **Because of their pride.** This is what pride does. It destroys relationships. It destroys families. It destroys churches. It destroys countries. It destroyed Israel.

These 42,000 could have been used to fight the real enemy, but because of their jealousy they fought their own brothers and they died. **Jephthah’s problem here is that he treats the Israelites like they were the Ammonites. He destroys them all.**

It is a dangerous thing to push God’s leadership. It is not wise to want power and authority. God can end up destroying one who does.

**FACT #4** – Jephthah judged Israel for six years and then died. **12:7**

The life that didn’t seem to amount to much at the beginning became a great useable life in the hand of God. Jephthah went from degradation to exaltation. That is what God does with people. He ends up in Hebrews 11:32 as a true faith hero.

**FACT #5** – After Jephthah, Ibzan judged Israel for seven years. **12:8-10**

Ibzan was from Bethlehem and as a judge he had thirty sons and thirty daughters, which was a blessing of God in view of the fact that Jephthah had sacrificed his one and only daughter. Ibzan was able to expand tribal boundaries through his daughters who became wives of other Israeli’s.

**FACT #6** – After Ibzan, Elon judged Israel for ten years. **12:11-12**

Nothing is known about Elon except that he was from the tribe of Zebulun.

**FACT #7** – After Elon, Abdon judged Israel for eight years. **12:13-15**

Abdon was the son of Hillel and he had forty sons and thirty grandsons.

**The contextual purpose of listing these three other judges is that due to Jephthah’s successful leadership, Israel’s land remained hers and things were relatively quiet for twenty-five years. God blessed Israel for many years and this all started when God raised up Jephthah.**

Jephthah was the “valiant warrior” who paved the way for peace.

Sometimes in order for the work to go forward, the proud and the arrogant must be removed.

This passage should do several things for us:

- 1) It should cause us to want to keep our ego always in check.
- 2) It should cause us to be involved and not sit on the sidelines and talk, murmur and complain.
- 3) It should cause us to be very careful about what we say with our mouths.
- 4) It should cause us to realize that with God not one person will be let off the hook.