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Judges 12

(2020)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Judges 12

Topics.

- Ephraim threatens to burn Jephthah's house over him.
- Jephthah's explains why he never called Ephraim to battle.
- Jephthah's fights against Ephraim.
- The Gileadites capture the fords of the Jordan river.
- Jephthah's judges Israel six years and died.
- Ibzan judges Israel seven years and died.
- Elon judges Israel ten years and died.
- Abdon judges Israel eight years and died.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES

The Israelites forgot the LORD, and worshipped false gods, so the LORD removed His protection and blessings from them, which resulted in them being oppressed by their enemies and crying to the LORD for deliverance. In answer to their prayer the LORD raised up twelve Judges to deliver them, but not Judges as we think of Judges today or preachers of righteousness, but rather military leaders and fighters, that led Israel to triumph over their enemies and delivered them from their wicked behaviour. Most suppose that Samuel (considered by some to be the last Judge) wrote some parts of the book, while other parts were written at a later time by someone of his generation or a later generation. The primary purpose of the Judges is best articulated in the following words, "The LORD raised up Judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. (Judges 2:16). For an overview of the entire book see the title:

- Overview of the Book of Judges (at the beginning of the index).

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

Jephthah sons drove him out of their house, sometime later the Ammonites made war against Israel, so Gilead made Jephthah leader over them. He made a horrific vow, and afterward defeated the Ammonites. Jephthah daughter came out to meet him and afterward asked her father for two months to weep for her virginity. Year by year the daughters of Israel lament the daughter of Jephthah.

EPHRAIM THREATENS TO BURN JEPHTHAHS HOUSE

JUDGES 12:1

- **Judges 12:1:** The men of Ephraim were called to arms, and they crossed to Zaphon (went northward KJV) and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the Ammonites and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house over you with fire."

We know that the gathering of the men of Ephraim for war, was around 50,000 men, because 42,000 of them were slain (Judges 12:6).

Why did you not call us to go with you? (v1) throughout the Book of Judges, the tribe of Ephraim is spoken of in a most unfavourable light, they are shown to be prideful, arrogant, quarrelsome and unhelpful during Israel's time of oppression, when other tribes have gone to battle and won the victory. (Josh. 17:14-18) (Judges 8:1). Now we see them quarrelling in the same manner as they had in the past.

The men of Ephraim were jealous of the tribe of Manasseh, of which both Gideon and Jephthah were, one half of the tribe of Manasseh was on this side Jordan, and the other half on the other side, and Ephraim was jealous of both, fearing they would receive great honour and glory, and by doing so gain a certain level of superiority over them. This jealousy seems to have stemmed from the fact Jacob their father had given Ephraim preference and this seems to be the underlying cause of their troublesome actions.

We will burn your house over you with fire: (v1), meaning they would burn them alive in their houses. Ephraim regarded it as an extreme offence that Jephthah had delivered Israel without considering the supremacy of their tribe (Judges 8:1). This extreme horrific threat shows the magnitude of the animosity Ephraim had toward Jephthah and the tribe of Manasseh.

JEPHTHAHS EXPLAINS WHY HE DID NOT CALL EPHRAIM

JUDGES 12:2-3

- **Judges 12:2-3:** And Jephthah said to them, "I and my people had a great dispute with the Ammonites, and when I called you, you did not save me from their hand.³ And when I saw that you would not save me, I took my life in my hand and crossed over against the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?"

2

During Jephthah time the oppression and raids of the Ammonites and Midianites, affected Manasseh and the Eastern tribes, far more than the tribe of Ephraim, which is why the Ephraimites selfishly never came to their aid, even though at some previous time Jephthah had asked the tribe of Ephraim to come to their aid (v2). We are not told when Jephthah previously called for Ephraim to come to their aid, which shows that this is a compressed account of all the events that took place during this era and not an expanded narrative embracing every event.

When I called you, you did not save me: (v2) Jephthah answers them with mildness and denies their charge that he did not call for their assistance, but rather that he did and they refused to grant it. Then tells Ephraim, once he knew they were not coming to join them in the battle, he gathered all the forces on the east of the Jordan river, and that they risked their lives to battle against their powerful oppressors. (Judges 11:29-30). He goes on to say, "Why do you seek vengeance on us, when we have faced such a vast fierce and mighty army to defend and deliver our tribes and your tribes."

Jephthah in this speech is no doubt trying to do everything he can to prevent a civil war. He is basically saying, since he, with the aid of his Gileadite volunteers had gone up against the Ammonites and the LORD had given them the victory without requiring any assistance from Ephraim, why are they taking offense, instead, of showing them gratitude and rejoicing with them in their victory, especially since the war had ended without them suffering any destruction and loss of lives. Added to this, if he had not fought and defeated the Ammonites, they would not only have overrun Gilead, but would also have crossed the river Jordan, and invaded the lands of Ephraim and the other tribes, as they had previously done (Judges 10:9), so the attitude of the Ephraimites, was one of extreme ingratitude, for their tribe was also greatly blessed by the destruction of the Ammonites.

JUDGES 12:4-6

- **Judges 12:4:** Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim. And the men of Gilead struck Ephraim, because they said, “You are fugitives of Ephraim, you Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh.”

All the men of Gilead, generally refers to all the Eastern tribes. It appears here that Jephthah is the aggressor, which seems strange, since his speech indicates that he was attempting to do all he could to avoid a civil war. However, since Ephraim was extremely hostile toward them and had threatened to burn them and their houses down, the most likely scenario is that in spite of Jephthah’s reasonable answer to the Ephraimites, they were still driven by their ruthless character and fierce jealousies and continued to threaten and provoke the Gileadites to wrath by intolerable taunts, which prevented them from dwelling in peace. Supporting this idea are the words, “you are fugitives of Ephraim, you Gileadites: (v4) these words imply bitter retribution, for they are contemptuous and scoffing words deliberately spoken to demean Jephthah and the Gileadites.

THE GILEADITES CAPTURE THE FORDS OF THE JORDAN

JUDGES 12:5-6

- **Judges 12:5-6:** And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, “Let me go over,” the men of Gilead said to him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” When he said, “No,”⁶ they said to him, “Then say Shibboleth,” and he said, “Sibboleth,” for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and slaughtered him at the fords of the Jordan. At that time 42,000 of the Ephraimites fell.

Shibboleth: means ford and can refer to, a stream, a river, deep waters, a flood, a channel of water, a flow or course of water. It is commonly known, that various nations who speak the same language, but in different provinces, or parts of the same nation, there are different dialects spoken and for this reason there are certain words that cannot be pronounce correctly.

In this context the word Shibboleth refers to a place along the river Jordan where there was only a small flow of water, and so could be easily passed so the word was suitable for the occasion, for it gave the men of Ephraim no reason to suspect why they were being asked to say, Shibboleth, because it expressed only their desire to cross over the Shibboleth (i.e., the place in the river where there was only a small flow of water, so the river could be easily crossed over. It was not the wrong pronunciation of Shibboleth that was the reason for putting men to death, but just the sign that showed he was an Ephraimite.

Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were slain: but not only at the fords of the Jordan river, but also including those killed in the battle, which means the Ephraimites paid a high price for their lack of gratitude, their insolence and their extreme pride and jealousy. Here we see the justice of God! The Ephraimites had gloried in the fact they were Ephraimites, and belittle and demeaned Jephthah and the Gileadites mockingly referred to them as fugitives, and now Ephraim themselves had become fugitives.

JEPHTHAHS JUDGED ISRAEL SIX YEARS AND DIES

JUDGES 12:7

- **Judges 12:7:** Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in his city in Gilead.

After the battles with the Ephraimites, Jephthah was acknowledged by all Israel as their Judge and supreme governor, but he did not live long. However difficult it may be for us to understand parts of Jephthah life (i.e., his vow to offer his daughter as a burnt offering), (Judges 11:30-40) he has been ranked in the hall of faith with those renowned for their great faith. (Heb. 11:32-33).

Jephthah was buried in his city in Gilead: after his death he was followed by a succession of the following three minor judges:

1. Ibzan who judged Israel seven years.
2. Elon who judged Israel ten years.
3. Abdon who judged Israel eight years.

The only information we are given concerning these three Judges, is the number of their families and the land in which they dwelt. (Judges 12:8-15).

IBZAN JUDGES ISRAEL SEVEN YEARS AND DIES

JUDGES 12:8-10

- **Judges 12:8-10:** After him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. ⁹ He had thirty sons, and thirty daughters he gave in marriage outside his clan, and thirty daughters he brought in from outside for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. ¹⁰ Then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem.

Ibzan: nothing more is known of Ibzan than what is detailed in these three verses. He gave his thirty daughters to men from other tribes to his own, or from other nations to be their wives, and for his thirty daughters gave them to men from other tribes to his own, or from other nations to be their wives. The fact he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, suggests he sought additional influence by intermarriages with other families, and that he was a man of wealth and had concubines. After a government of six years, he was buried in Bethlehem. (Judges 12:8-10).

ELON JUDGES ISRAEL TEN YEARS AND DIES

JUDGES 12:11

- **Judges 12:11-12:** After him Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel, and he judged Israel ten years. ¹² Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.

The name Elon means "oak tree," even today some Orientals are named from trees, for the symbolise strength and long life, especially the oak tree. Elon was of the tribe of Zebulun, and judged Israel ten years, meaning he administered justice to them, kept them true to Israel's religion and from idolatry.

The tribe of Zebulun had shown its bravery and patriotism in the time of Israel's prophetess Deborah and Barak, during which they risked their lives to against Sisera the commander of Jabin the king of Canaan, who went up against Israel with 900 chariots of iron and a vast army. (Judges 4:10), the LORD gave Israel a great victory. At the end of his ten years of government he was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun. Aijalon maybe added here to distinguish it from other Aijalons in different territories (Judges 1:35) (1 Chron. 6:69) (1 Chron. 8:13).

JUDGES 12:13-15

- **Judges 12:13-15:** After him Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel. 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.

The name, Abdon means “servant,” he was called the Pirathonite because it was the place where he was born and died.

The fact he lived to see his sons married and his grandchildren grow up shows he lived a long life and the fact, they had seventy donkeys, which in these days were considered an honourable animal, shows that they were a family of wealth. Judges used donkeys as they travelled throughout the nation in their circuits to administer justice, and the common people used them for trade and carrying goods.

After judging Israel eight years, he died and was buried in Pirathon, in the land of Ephraim (1 Chron. 27:14) (Judges 12:15), in a place that was called, “the mount of the Amalekites,” also called, “Mount Amalek,” either from the name of a person it belonged to, or because the Amalekites previously dwelt in it, or because of some remarkable victory or advantage Israel had gained over the Amalekites.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.
