

CHAPTER 12

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES 12

This chapter relates a quarrel between Jephthah and the Ephraimites, which was fatal to the latter, (^{<0711E>}Judges 12:1-6), the time of Jephthah judging Israel, his death and burial, (^{<0711E>}Judges 12:7) and it briefly makes mention of three more judges of Israel, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, (^{<0711E>}Judges 11:8-15).

Ver. 1. *And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together*, etc.] Or “cried” ^{f249}; got together by a cry or proclamation made: in the Hebrew text it is, “a man of Ephraim”; not a single man, but a body of men, who met together and joined as one man. It is highly probable that there were no less than 50,000 of them; for 42,000 of them were slain, (^{<0711E>}Judges 12:6)

and went northward; or, “went over northward” ^{f250}; that is, over the river Jordan, which lay between Gilead and Ephraim; and when they had crossed the river, they turned northward; for Mizpeh, where Jephthah lived, was in the north of the land, near Hermon and Lebanon, (^{<0711E>}Joshua 11:3)

and said unto Jephthah, wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon? not over Jordan, but over that part of the land of Israel from the plain where Jephthah dwelt, to the country of the children of Ammon:

and didst not call us to go with thee? they quarrel with him just in the same manner as they did with Gideon: these Ephraimites were a proud and turbulent people, and especially were very jealous of the tribe of Manasseh, of which both Gideon and Jephthah were; the one of the half tribe on this side Jordan, and the other of the half that was on the other side; and they were jealous of both, lest any honour and glory should accrue thereunto, and they should get any superiority in any respect over them, since Jacob their father had given the preference to Ephraim; and this seems to lie at the bottom of all their proceedings:

we will burn thine house upon thee with fire; that is, burn him and his house, burn his house and him in it; which shows that they were in great

wrath and fury, and argued not only the height of pride and envy, but wretched ingratitude, and a cruel disposition; who, instead of congratulating him as Israel's deliverer, and condoling him with respect to the case of his only child, threaten him in this brutish manner.

Ver. 2. *And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at a great strife with the children of Ammon,* etc.] As to the cause of the war, or the reason of his going over to fight the children of Ammon, it was a strife or contention between the Gileadites and them, concerning their country; which the children of Ammon claimed as theirs, and the Gileadites insisted on it they had a just right to it; by which it appeared that this was not a personal contention between Jephthah and them; and therefore the Ephraimites had no reason to fall so furiously upon him particularly; and it was a contention which chiefly concerned the two tribes and a half, and not the rest; and so could not be blamed for defending themselves alone if they could, without interesting others in the quarrel: but this is not all he has to say, he adds,

and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands; it seems he had called them to assist in driving the enemy out of their borders when there, and they refused to help him; though it is not elsewhere said, and it is not denied by them, so that it was false what they alleged; or however, since they declined giving him any assistance, when the children of Ammon were in his country, he could not expect they would join him in an expedition into theirs.

Ver. 3. *And when I saw that ye delivered me not,* etc.] Gave him no assistance against their common enemy, did not attempt to save him and his people out of their hands, but left them to defend themselves:

I put my life in my hands; ready to deliver it up in the defence of his country; the meaning is, that he exposed himself to the utmost danger, hazarded his life in going with a few troops into an enemy's country to fight him, and so liable to lose his life; which was in as much danger, as some observe, as any brittle thing contained in the hand is in danger of falling, or of being snatched out of it:

and passed over against the children of Ammon: took a long and fatiguing march over the land of Gilead into that of the children of Ammon, to fight with them:

and the Lord delivered them into my hand; gave him victory over them, which showed that his cause was just, and his call to engage in it clear:

wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day to fight against me? who rather should have come with thanks to him for the service he had done, not only for the Gileadites, but for all Israel; for had he not fought against the children of Ammon, and conquered them, they would have soon not only overrun and oppressed Gilead, but would have come over Jordan, and dispossessed the other tribes, and particularly Ephraim, as they had done already, (⁽⁷¹¹⁾Judges 10:9) so that it was base ingratitude in these people to come to fight against Jephthah, who had fought for them, and wrought salvation for them.

Ver. 4. *Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim,* etc.] The Ephraimites not being pacified with the account Jephthah gave of the war between him and the children of Ammon, but continuing in their tumultuous outrage; he, being a man of spirit and courage, got as many of the Gileadites together as he could, and gave them battle:

and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim; had the advantage of them, worsted them, killed many of them, and put the rest to flight:

because they said, ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites; what provoked them to fall upon them with the greater fury, and use them the more severely when, they had the better of them, was their reproachful language to them, insulting the Gileadites, who perhaps were chiefly, if not all, of the half tribe of Manasseh beyond Jordan, of which Jephthah was, that they were the scum of the house of Joseph, that they had run away from their brethren, and dwelt in a corner of the land by themselves; and were of no account at all among Ephraim and Manasseh, and disclaimed by them both, and not esteemed by either. The Targum is,

“the fugitives of Ephraim said, what are ye Gileadites accounted of among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites?”

on which Kimchi remarks, that those Ephraimites that came in this tumultuous manner, and insulted Jephthah, were a most abject company of men, the refuse of the tribe of Ephraim, shepherds who through necessity were obliged to come over Jordan with their flocks and herds for pasture: but the words may be rendered, “for they said, fugitives of Ephraim are ye,

even the Gileadites, who were, or being between the Ephraimites and the Manassites”; that is, the Gileadites called the Ephraimites so, when they fled before them, and when they got at the fords of Jordan, which lay between Ephraim and the half tribe of Manasseh on the other side Jordan; and they are in the next verse expressly so called.

Ver. 5. *And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites*, etc.] Being either swifter of foot, or going a nearer and shorter way, being better acquainted with their own country:

and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, let me go over; the fugitives of Ephraim, as before called, who ran away from the battle, made their escape, and the best of their way to the passages of Jordan, to get over there to their own country:

that the men of Gilead said unto him; to everyone of them, as they came up,

art thou an Ephraimite? or an Ephrathite; for so it seems those of the tribe of Ephraim were called, as Jeroboam, (⁴¹¹²⁶1 Kings 11:26)

if he said, nay; that he was not an Ephraimite;

Ver. 6. *Then said they unto him, say now “Shibboleth”*, etc.] Which signifies a stream or course of water, at which they now were; and so it was as if they had bid them say,

“may I, or let me, pass over the stream of this river;”

so Jarchi; and this being the case, though it was done to try them, and by their pronunciation learn whether they were Ephraimites or not, they were not upon their guard, but in an hurry, and at once expressed the word as they commonly did:

and he said, sibboleth; pronouncing the letter “shin” as if it was “sin”, or a “samech”; just as the French, as Kimchi observes, pronounce “s” like a “t”; and though the Gileadites and Ephraimites were of the same nation of Israel, and spoke the same language, yet their pronunciation differed, as did that of the Galilean Jews from others in the times of Christ, (⁴¹¹⁷³Matthew 26:73), and so in all nations, among the Greeks, Romans, and among ourselves, people in different counties pronounce in a different manner; which Kimchi thinks was in the Ephraimites owing to the air or climate, as

the French, he observes, pronounce “s” as a “t”, with a soft and gentle sound:

for he could not frame to pronounce it right; or “thus” ^{f251}, as he was bid to do; being used to pronounce otherwise, he could not frame the organs of speech, or so dispose and order them as to say “shibboleth”; or he did not frame, order, and dispose ^{f252}; he was not careful to do it, though with some care he could, being not aware of the design of the Gileadites in it:

then they took him and slew him at the passages of Jordan; everyone as they came thither, who could not say “shibboleth”; these they suffered not to pass over, but slew them:

and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand; not at the passages of Jordan only; but what fell there, with those at the battle, and in the pursuit, amounted to this number; so that the Ephraimites paid dearly for their pride and insolence.

Ver. 7. *And Jephthah judged Israel six years*, etc.] After the affair of the Ephraimites, he was acknowledged by all Israel as their judge and supreme governor, but did not live long; being perhaps depressed and worn away with grief, on account of his daughter, and other troubles that attended him:

then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead: it is not said in what city he was buried, but very probably it was in his own city Mizpeh, where he dwelt. Josephus ^{f253} says it was in his own country, Sebee, a city of Gilead.

Ver. 8. *And after him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.*] There were two Bethlehems, one in the tribe of Zebulun, (^{f254}Joshua 19:15) of which some think this man was; and another in the tribe of Judah, the city of Jesse and David, and of the Messiah; and Josephus says ^{f254}, Ibzan was of the tribe of Judah, of the city of Bethlehem; and because Boaz was of the same place, and lived in the times of the judges, the Jewish Rabbins ^{f255} are of opinion that he is the same with Ibzan; so Jarchi and Ben Gersom.

Ver. 9. *And he had thirty sons and thirty daughters*, etc.] Which was a very uncommon case for a man to have so many children, and those as to their sex to be equal. Between the former judge and him there was a great difference, in respect of this circumstance of children; he had but one daughter, an only child; and she, by reason of his vow, not suffered to

marry. Such a difference does God, in his all wise Providence, make even among good men: nor is this any certain characteristic of a good man. Danaus had fifty daughters, and his brother Egyptus fifty sons, who were married to each other; and the husbands were all slain by their wives but one, on the wedding night, and so far from being happy in them: but it was otherwise with this judge:

whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons; his daughters he sent abroad, or married them, to persons not of another nation, nor of another tribe, but of another family of the same tribe, and these he dismissed from him to live with their husbands; and he took in daughters of families in the same tribe to be wives to his sons, and who seem to have dwelt together; it being the custom then for sons, though married, to abide with their father, and their wives with them; as Abarbinel says is the custom at Zenobia unto this day:

and he judged Israel seven years; and in his days the wars of Troy are said ^{f256} to begin; but they began in the times of Jephthah his predecessor, and ended in his ^{f257}.

Ver. 10. *Then died Ibzan, and was buried in Bethlehem.*] He died at the end of his seven years of government, and was buried in his native place; nothing memorable having happened during his being judge; this is all that is recorded of him.

Ver. 11. *And after him Elon a Zebulonite judged Israel,* etc.] One of the tribe of Zebulun:

and he judged Israel ten years; administered justice to them, preserved them in the true religion, and from idolatry; though it does not appear that any enemies arose in his time against them, from whom he delivered them.

Ver. 12. *And Elon the Zebulonite died,* etc.] At the end of his ten years of government:

and was buried in Aijalon in the country of Zebulun; which is added to distinguish it from another Aijalon in the tribe of Dan (^{<0015>}Judges 1:35).

Ver. 13. *And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel.*] So called from Pirathon, where he was born, and which was in the tribe of Ephraim, as appears from (^{<0715>}Judges 12:15).

Ver. 14. *And he had forty sons, and thirty nephews*, etc.] Or sons' sons, that is, grandsons; so that he lived not only to see his sons married, but his grandchildren grown up to men's estate; since it follows,

that rode on seventy ass colts; who were either employed by him to ride about on these animals, which in those times were honourable; (see ~~v.50~~Judges 5:10) to administer justice throughout the nation in their circuits; or rather, not following any trade, or being concerned in husbandry, or feeding cattle, but being men of estates, rode about like gentlemen:

and he judged Israel eight years; in his time it is said ^{f258} the city of Troy was destroyed; so Eusebius ^{f259}, who calls this judge Labdon, though he elsewhere ^{f260} places it in the times of Eli; (see Gill on "~~v.47~~Judges 12:9").

Ver. 15. *And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died*, etc.] At the end of his eight years' government;

and was buried at Pirathon, in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites; in the place where he was born, and from whence he had the name of a Pirathonite; and this was in the tribe of Ephraim, and the particular spot was Mount Amalek; so called either from the name of the person to whom it belonged, or because the Amalekites formerly dwelt in it; or rather because of some remarkable advantage got over them at this place: here, Josephus says ^{f261}, this judge had a magnificent funeral.