

# Judges

## Chapter 12

### *Jephthah's Conflict with Ephraim*

**The men of Ephraim were called to arms, and they crossed to Zaphon 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.” 2 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?” 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.” 5 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. Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in his city in Gilead.**

**12:1** *did not call us.* Ephraim, in its arrogance, chafed because it wanted leadership of the region and a share in the booty. Luth: “The sons of Ephraim were always prouder than the rest, for they had been adopted by Jacob and preferred to Manasseh, and they had been born of Joseph, a patriarch exalted above the others. Therefore they had grown haughty because of such privileges, as they were also proudly puffed up in opposition to Gideon and Jephthah” (AE 11:40). (TLSB)

*burn down your house.* The Philistines issued a similar threat to Samso’s wife (14:15). (CSB)

**12:2** *said to them.* Again Jephthah tried diplomacy first. (CSB)

Ephraim wanted to share in the credit for victory after the fighting was already over. (TLSB)

*I called.* New information on the sequence of events. (CSB)

Not mentioned in ch 11 because it had no effect.(TLSB)

*did not save.* Ephraimites failed to come when Jephthah needed them. (TLSB)

**12:3** *I took my life in my hand.* Jephthah risked his life for a victory but the Ephraimites did nothing but complain. (TLSB)

**12:4** *Gilead.* Tribes of Gad, Reuben, and part of Manasseh lived east of the Jordan, outside the boundaries of the Promised Land. God approved this arrangement. (CSB)

*they.* Ephraimites. (TLSB)

*fugitives.* Ephraim is insulting the Gileadites as an illegitimate mob living outside the tribal identities. Cf Jsh 22. (TLSB)

**12:5** *fords of the Jordan*. Where the Ephraimites were trying to retreat back across the river to their homeland. (TLSB)

**12:6** *Shibboleth*. Ironically, the word meant “floods” (see, e.g., Ps 69:2, 15). Apparently the Israelites east of the Jordan pronounced its initial letter with a strong “sh” sound, while those in Canaan gave it a softer “s” sound. (Peter was similarly betrayed by his accent; see Mt 26:73.) (CSB)

Tribes were already so dis-unified as to have acquired regional dialects. (TLSB)

42,000. Number of casualties in the war. (TLSB)

**12:7** *judged Israel for six years*. A new formula for closing out the account of a judge. (CSB)

**12:1–7** The tribe of Ephraim, in its pride and jealousy, is angry at not participating in the glory of Jephthah’s victory and threatens to kill the Gileadites. Instead, identifying their enemies by their regional dialect, the Gileadites defeat Ephraim, killing 42,000 of their fellow Israelites. God uses Jephthah, a sinner, to deliver His people. God’s grace to and through Jephthah may remind us of the deliverance He provides us through Christ, not by our own merit. This destroys human pride, but gives us a greater victory. • O Lord, forgive us for our desire for glory and for despising others. Give us the right word for crossing into eternity, namely, the right confession of Your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen. (TLSB)

*Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon*

**8 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. 11 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. 13 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.**

**12:8** *Bethlehem*. Probably the Bethlehem in western Zebulun. (CSB)

May be the city in Judah where David and Jesus were born or the other town of that same name in Zebulun (Jsh 19:15). (TLSB)

**12:9** *outside*. Marriage outside the “clan,” or extended family unit, would have been proper. Marriage outside Israel would not. The Hbr does not specify “clan” but just says “outside,” so the meaning is not completely clear. (TLSB)

*thirty sons and thirty daughters*. One way to achieve civic order among such fractious tribes was through marriage alliances which may have kept the peace for the seven years of his judgeship. (TLSB)

**12:11** *Elon*. Also the name of a clan in the tribe of Zebulun (Ge 46:14; Nu 26:26). (CSB)

**12:12** *Elon ... Aijalon*. Name of the judge and name of his burial site have exactly the same consonantal spelling in Hbr. (TLSB)

*Aijalon in the land of Zebulun*. Archaeologists have identified possible sites for this city. (TLSB)

**12:14** *forty sons and thirty grandsons.* A total of 70. (CSB)

Polygamy was common. (TLSB)

**12:15** *hill country of the Amalekites.* The background of this reference is unknown; the Amalekites are otherwise associated with the Negev (Nu 13:29). (CSB)

**12:8–15** Three “minor” judges are mentioned, but nothing is said of their deeds, other than that two of them have large families. Unlike other judges, these deal with no invaders, no civil war, and no dramatic sins. Nevertheless, the people still need to be judged through God’s servants who apply His Law. Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon—living out both their spiritual offices (in their judgeships) and temporal offices (in their families)—stand as examples of the doctrine of vocation. Nothing is recorded of their good works. Yet, God was still pleased with them on account of their faith. • O Lord, make me faithful in my everyday callings. May I ever cling to Your Word, appreciate Your daily blessings, and call on You in every need. Through Christ, our Lord, I pray. Amen. (TLSB)