
Judges 12

Judges 12:1–15

Ephraim vs. Jephthah

Outline of Chapter 12:

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- Vv. 8–10 **Ibzan, the judge with a lot of children**
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Charts:

Introduction: In Judges 12 we will see an altercation between Ephraim (which is west of the Jordan) and Gilead (which is east). Jephthah, in his typically diplomatic way, will try to talk some sense into them; however, this goes from adversarial to an actual war between Israeli tribes, and the men of Gilead will be victorious. At the end of this chapter there are three more judges mentioned with very little additional information. It would be reasonable to suppose that these are all judges east of the Jordan River.

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Ephraim's Contention with Jephthah

Slavishly literal:

Moderately literal:

And so were summoned men of Ephraim and so he crossed over northward and so they said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against sons of Ammon and to us you did not call to go with you? Your house we will burn over you in fire."

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And the men of Ephraim were summoned so they crossed over northward and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon and you did not call to us to go with you? We will burn your house over you with fire."

Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, so they crossed over northward and confronted Jephthah, saying, "Why did you cross over the Jordan to fight against the Ammonites without calling upon us to go with you? We will burn your house with fire with you in it."

Let's see what some others have done first:

The Emphasized Bible

And the men of Ephraim were called together, and passed over northward, —and said unto Jephthah— Wherefore didst thou pass over to do battle with the sons of Ammon and for us didst not call to go with thee? thy house will we consume over thee with fire. Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they crossed to Zaphon [or, northward] 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."

NASB

Young's Lit. Translation

And the men of Ephraim are called together, and pass over northward, and say to Jephthah, 'Wherefore hast thou passed over to fight against the Bene-Ammon, and on us hast not called to go with thee? thy house we burn over thee with fire.'

The first verb is the Niphal imperfect (passive incomplete) of tsâ'âq (קַעַץ) [pronounced *tsaw-GAHK*], which means *to cry, to cry out, to call*. In the Niphal, it means *to be called, to be summoned, to be drafted*. Strong's #6817 BDB #858.

We obviously have an area of contention, so let's cover that word-by-word. The verb is the 3rd person masculine singular, Qal imperfect of 'â^bvar (רַבַּעַ) [pronounced *aw^b-VAHR*], which means *to pass over, to pass through, to pass, to go over*. Strong's #5674 BDB #716. This is followed by the word tsphôwmâh (הַצְפֹּנָה) [pronounced *tsaw-foh-NAW*], which is very similar to the simple word for north, which is tsâphôwn (צְפוֹן) [pronounced *tsaw-FOHN*], which simply means *north*. The *New Englishman's Hebrew Concordance* does not differentiate between these two words, nor does BDB, Gesenius or Strong. However, Gesenius notes that with the *âh* ending, this word means *northward*. This appears to be nothing more than the *he locale* (to be covered later in v. 9). Seeing that Gilead is located in the middle and northern portion of the land east of the Jordan and that Ephraim is at the very southern portion of the Jordan on the west, *northward* appears to be a no-brainer. Strong's #6828 BDB #860. Now, there is a Zaphon in Joshua 13:27 (which is roughly in the same geographical area); however, there it lacks the *ah* ending.¹

McGee: *We have seen that the men of Ephraim also quarreled with Gideon (8:1) when he didn't summon them to help him rout the Midianites. Now in a hostile way, they demanded that Jephthah give them the reason why he did not ask for their help in the battle. The jealousy of Ephraim was a real infection that led to a defection. Later on, when the kingdom is divided into north and south, you will find out that Ephraim is the center of all of the rebellion. And it goes back to their jealousy.*

*There is a jealousy in the church today. It is one of our greatest problems. Paul said, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3). "Strife and vainglory" can be vanity and envy. There are two things that cause problems in churches today. When I hear some person in a church complain that it is not being run the way he thinks it should be, I wonder if he is jealous. When I find someone who is opposing the preacher all of the time, I suspect there is jealousy behind it.*²

Ephraim and Manasseh had a splendid beginning. Their patriarch was Joseph, who was great among his twelve brothers, the sons of Jacob. Ephraim and Manasseh were his two sons. However, Ephraim had occasion to behave in an unsavory manner, as we find them doing here. Although we were not given the details before, when Jephthah pursued after Ephraim, some of the fighting apparently occurred on the other side of the Jordan. When it did, Jephthah just went ahead and did the fighting with his men and did not contact Ephraim. Ephraim then throws a spoiled child fit, as they did with Gideon in Judges 8:1b: **"What is this thing you have done to us, not calling us when you went to fight against Midian?"** Here, not only do they threaten Jephthah's life, they threaten him with a terrible death of being burned alive with his family. We find a similar threat made by heathen Philistines against a wife of Samson in Judges 14:15 and then executed later in Judges 15:6. It appears as though execution by fire was an occasional heathen practice (see Gen. 38:24). The Israelites also burned some victims and cities after they were dead (see Joshua 7:25 Judges 20:48³).

And so said Jephthah unto them, "A man of strife I was—I and my people and sons of Ammon extremely; and so I called you [all] and you [all] did not deliver me out from their hand.

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Then Jephthah said to them, "I was a man of great strife—I and my people and sons of Ammon; and I called you [all] and you [all] did not deliver me out from their hand.

¹ Let me footnote here, however, that Keil and Delitzsch name an area where the *ah* ending is added: yâsam (צַסַּם) [pronounced *yah-SAWM*] and 'iy^esamâh (צַסַּמָּה) [pronounced *ee-SAH-maw*], but this is not quite the same thing, nor is it common. Lots of words are modified by the *ah* ending, but what is modified is their meanings.

² J. Vernon McGee, *Joshua Judges*, ©1976 by Thru the Bible Books; p. 183.

³ Other pertinent passages, such as Joshua 8:8, 19 and Judges 1:8, are inconclusive. It is uncertain in those citations whether the people were killed first or not.

Therefore, Jephthah replied, “I and my people were engaged in a grave conflict with the sons of Ammon, and when I called upon you for help, you did not come to rescue me.

Well, I don't know what he says at first, so let's see some other renderings:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And Jephthah said unto them, Great strife had I and my people even with the sons of Ammon; but when I cried unto you for help ye saved me not out of their hand.
NASB	And 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.
NJB	Jephthah replied, ‘My people and I were in serious conflict with the Ammonites. I summoned you, but you did not come to rescue me from them.
Owen's Translation	And Jephthah said to them, “A man of feud I was—I am my people with the Ammonites exceedingly and when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand.
REB	Jephthah answered, ‘I and my people had a grave feud with the Ammonites, and had I appealed to you for help, you would not have saved us from them.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	And Jephthah saith unto them, ‘A man of great strife I have been (I and my people) with the Bene-Ammon, and I call you, and ye have not saved me out of their hand,...

As you can see, this verse is interpreted in several different ways. Significant is that Revised English Bible indicates that Jephthah did not contact the Ephraimites for help, as he knew that they would not have come to his aid. I don't know that we have a valid reason in the Hebrew for rendering this verse in this way, however. It is more of a matter of interpretation, keeping in mind that in Jephthah's war with the Ammonites that Ephraim is never mentioned.

What Jephthah says to them begins with the construct of the word *man* and is followed by masculine singular noun $r\ddot{y}^b v$ (רִיב) [pronounced *ree^bv*] and it means *strife, dispute, controversy*. Strong's #7379 BDB #936. This is followed by the 1st person Qal perfect of *to be*, followed by the phrase *I and my people and sons of Ammon*. According to the NRSV, the Greek adds *who oppressed us* after *sons of Ammon*; however, that is not in the beta manuscript, which is what I have.⁴ This is followed by the adverb $m^{\text{e}}\text{d}$ (מְעַד) [pronounced *m^e-ODE*], which means *exceedingly, extremely, greatly, very*. Strong's #3966 BDB #547. My guess is that this adverb goes back with the word *strife*, which is how most translators render it. If we had the additional phrase, *who oppressed us*, then it would be more appropriately placed with that phrase.

Apparently during the battle with Ammon, probably while it was strictly east of the Jordan, Jephthah had sent out a request to Ephraim for help; however, they did not respond to his call. Again, this is a matter of interpretation, as Barnes: *This circumstance is not related in the main narrative. It is likely to have occurred when Jephthah was first chosen leader by the Gileadites, and when Ephraim would probably ignore is pretensions.*⁵ Scripture does not indicate that Jephthah did or did not. If he did not, the REB would have the best translation with regards to Jephthah's proposed summoning of Ephraim for help.

You will note that Jephthah here, as in Judges 11:12–28, resorts to trying to reason with his enemy. There is no reason why this difference of opinion has to end up in a war. Jephthah is well aware of that. Furthermore, we would not want to have a civil war break out between Gilead and Manasseh. It looks wrong for the people of God to be at such odds with one another as to go to war with one another. We are admonished several times in the New Testament to make an attempt to get along with other believers. In I Cor. 6, believers were taking other believers to court, and Paul asks them what the hell do they think they are doing appearing before unbelievers for some sort of verdict concerning a disagreement between believers. If believers are going to judge the world, then what is the deal with them asking the world to render a judgment over them? Listen carefully, Paul tells these

⁴ The NRSV also claims that this is found in the *Old Latin* and in a Syriac manuscript. *The Complete Parallel Bible*; NRSV, REB, NAB, NJB; Oxford University Press; ©1993; p. 536. Rotherham, who usually mentions these things, does not.

⁵ *Barnes' Notes, Volume 2*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 448.

believers that **it is better to be wronged and defrauded than it is to take another believer to court** (I Cor. 6:1–11).

Later, in the same book, Paul warns believers against exercising their liberty in Christ in such a way as to cause other believers to stumble (I Cor. 8–9; the believers who would allow themselves to stumble over the behavior of other believers are dealt with in the following chapter). Rom. 12 deals with the same subject.

Further along in the same book of I Corinthians, we have believers speaking disparagingly of one another with regards to spiritual gifts. Paul reasons that we are all members of the same body and we are completely wrong if we act as though God's use of us is in any way superior to God's use of any other believer. A person may have a flashy spiritual gift, such as evangelism, like Billy Graham. Another older, invalid woman, hardly ever seen by any other person, might have a ministry of prayer to support Billy Graham's ministry. Neither one is superior by reason of their gift over the other and, if anything, Billy Graham is more dependant upon that woman's prayers than she is upon his ministry. However, they are both members of the same body, both directed by God as to what their function here on earth is. And, so you are not confused, they could both receive equivalent rewards in heaven. God uses every single believer, if that believer learns His Word and stays filled with the Spirit. The relative flashiness of the gift is not an issue in any way. Paul's work here was to eliminate the conflict and browbeating that was a result of different people in the same church having different spiritual gifts. Any moron knows that on a baseball team, not everyone plays the same position. However, the competent and professional playing of each member of the team impacts the final outcome. One player may be in the spotlight more than another, but a team wins based upon their team effort. A quarterback may be the person best remembered from a football team, but you will not recall the name of a quarterback who did not have an impregnable line protecting him. You remove his protection, and he is no longer in the game. I Cor. 12–14 is not a treatise on the obsolete gift of tongues but more upon the interrelationship of various believers and their various spiritual gifts. The rules of conduct in the final chapter is more of an aside than the focus of the narrative. Rom. 12:1–8 also focuses upon the interrelationship of believers with diverse spiritual gifts. Paul focuses on the topic of Christian unity in Eph. 4 as well. John approaches the topic of Christian unity from another perspective: we are to have agapê love toward other believers, as he explains in I John 3.

In II Cor. 8–9, Paul calls upon the Corinthians to share their worldly possessions with those believers who need them. Again, the call is for cooperation among fellow believers. We are in the same family.

One final area of importance is that we are, with Israel, the foundation of God's kingdom here on this earth. We are not to enter into conflicts with Israel, even fallen Israel, as God has not set them aside forever. Those of Israel who are believers are every bit as much our brothers as anyone else (this goes for all races and whatever other boundaries we devise). Paul deals with this in Eph. 2.

Now, I have taken a rather complex and lengthy topic and covered it in a very short few paragraphs. Some time in the future, we will need to examine in full the **Doctrine of Christian Unity**. And, so that you do not have an unbalanced view of this: Christian unity is only one side of the coin. God also enjoins us in Scripture in several places to separate ourselves principally from certain other believers. We covered the **Doctrine of Separation** back in Deut. 17:7.

“And so I saw that you [were] not a deliverer and so I put my soul in my palm and so I crossed over unto sons of Ammon and so gave them Y^{ehowah} into my hand. And to why have you come unto me the day the this to fight against me?”

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“And [when] I saw that you [were] not a deliverer, then I put my soul in my palm and I crossed over to the sons of Ammon and Y^{ehowah} gave them into my hand. So why have you come to me this day to fight against me?”

“So, when I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my own life in my hands and crossed over to the sons of Ammon and Jehovah gave them into my hand. So, tell me again why you have come to me this day to fight against me?”

One of the words here is kaph (קַפַּ) [pronounced *kaf*], which means *palm, hollow or flat of the hand, sole of the foot* and even *bowl*. These various renderings are tied together by the concept of *the hollow*. Strong's #3709 BDB #496. We find this same phrase, *my soul in my palm*, in I Sam. 19:5 28:21 Job 13:14. This *phrase expresses the utmost possible risk, knowingly incurred*.⁶

Jephthah is rightfully aghast at their impertinence. He called up Ephraim for help and they did not help him. Was there some mood swing in them that he was supposed to intuitively guess at in the midst of battle? This may appear to be illogical to you. It appears that way to Jephthah.

I recall one time in particular (although there were several) when I had just finished an enormously successful year in teaching where I felt as though the students responded well to me, that they received a great deal from my class, and that the end result was quite satisfactory to all—and then would get called into the office and bitched at for all of these unimportant, non-essential things. Several of the students kept in touch for years; some wrote letters of praise; and yet, what appeared to be inexplicable to me, I was called on the carpet with the implication that I was a lousy teacher doing a substandard job. There will be times that you do everything right, and someone will have a problem with it. At that point, you cannot allow yourself to become bitter or disillusioned; you always do your job as unto God, regardless of how unappreciative those around you act. I've had real estate transactions which went smoothly, and that everything fell into place; yet there was one small detail or problem at the end (which is not unusual, as most sales involve roughly 30 different people), and the buyer or seller is less than happy with the result because everything was not peachy, despite the fact that you did your job. You simply have to continue doing your job as before God—it does not matter if you are blamed for things which were out of your control; it does not matter if those around you are unappreciative; it does not matter what people think—you do the very best job that you can, acting with integrity and honor. Jephthah was that sort of a person. He did nothing wrong and now before him stand these asses from Ephraim threatening his life. He has just delivered Israel from 18 years of subjugation to the sons of Ammon and now these Ephraimites have a problem with that. People sometimes are just hard to believe.

And so gathered Jephthah all men of Gilead and so he fought Ephraim and so they struck down men of Gilead Ephraim, for they said, "Fugitives of Ephraim you [are] Gilead in a midst of Ephraim and in a midst of Manasseh."

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So Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and he fought Ephraim and the men of Gilead struck down Ephraim, because they had said, "You [are] fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in a midst of Ephraim [and] in a midst of Manasseh."

Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and he fought against Ephraim and they soundly defeated Ephraim, because they had said, "You are fugitives of Ephraim, you Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh."

There are only a couple of problems in this verse; however, I will give you a few other translations so that you can see what others have done:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim, —and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Fugitives of Ephraim are ye, O ye Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim, in the midst of Manasseh.
NASB	Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated [lit., smote] Ephraim, because they said, "You are fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim in the midst of Manasseh."
REB	Jephthah then mustered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim, and the Gileadites defeated them.

⁶ *Barnes' Notes, Volume 2*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 448.

Young's Lit. Translation And Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead, and fighteth with Ephraim, and they men of Gilead smite Ephraim, because they said, 'Fugitives of Ephraim are ye Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim—in the midst of Manasseh.'

You will note the brevity of the REB here. The alpha Greek manuscript omits the latter half of the verse. My beta version has it. Several codices—the beta Septuagint, the Syriac, the Vulgate and two early printed editions have *in a midst of Ephraim* **and** *in a midst of Manasseh*.

What Gilead had been called was the masculine plural of pâlîyṭ (פְּלִיט) [pronounced *paw-LEET*], which means *escaped one, fugitive*. Strong's #6412 BDB #812. I don't quite follow completely the insult which is delivered here. My best guess is that they were in a territory where they did not belong (this is according to Ephraim), and when they left, they left essentially as fugitives. They essentially trespassed into Ephraimite territory, and in doing so, took some of the prerogatives of Ephraim and Manasseh. In any case, keep in mind that this trespassing into Ephraim delivered Ephraim and Manasseh from the subjugation of the Ammonites. Keil and Delitzsch quote Rosenmüller, who gives this paraphrase-interpretation: "*Ye Gileadites are a mob gathered together from Ephraimites that have run away; ye are an obscure set of men, men of no name, dwelling in the midst of two most noble and illustrious tribes.*"⁷

Barnes puts a different spin on this. He claims that *they* refer not to the Ephraimites, but to the Gileadites. The Gileadites tell these men that they are fugitives from the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh; i.e., they are not true Manassites and Ephraimites. The only problem with this is that we have the proper noun *Gilead* show up in the middle of what is said. I don't see any other way of rendering *Gilead* except as a vocative—*O Gileadite*.

And so took Gileadites fords of the Jordan to Ephraim and he was when said fugitives of Ephraim, "I would cross over." And so said to him, men of Gilead, "Are an Ephraimite you?" And so he said, "No."

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Then the Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan to Ephraim, and it was when a fugitive of Ephraim said, "Let me pass over." Then the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" And he would say, "No."

Therefore, the Gileadites took the crossing points of the Jordan into Ephraim, and whenever a fugitive of Ephraim asked to pass over, the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" And he would say "No."

There were places on the Jordan where a few people could cross, and these were called *fords*. The Gileadites took these areas and guarded them, due to the threats given by the men of Manasseh. In this way, they cut off their retreat back to Ephraim. Jephthah had a cancer growing in his midst and he was going to wipe it out completely.

One of the reasons that Barnes interprets the last line of the previous verse as being spoken by the Gileadites is the use of *fugitive of Ephraim* in this verse. In this verse, *fugitive of Ephraim* refers to a person who crossed over from Ephraim into Gilead in opposition to Jephthah and Gilead. However, what this is, is a play on words. The Ephraimites called the Gileadites fugitives of Ephraim and Manasseh; the writer here (probably Jephthah), turns the tables on them and calls them *fugitives of Ephraim*.

One of the things which stands out about Jephthah is that he is diplomatic, a thinker, and he considers his various options. He speaks sometimes in complex sentences which reveal moderately complex thoughts. He is not above using a little irony in his speech and passing this along to his men.

What we get with this verse is not a specific incident, but several incidents which followed a pattern. Due to the war between Gilead and Manasseh, there were a number of enemy Ephraimite soldiers who were stuck on the Gilead side of the Jordan. When they asked to cross over, they would be asked if they were from Ephraim. The

⁷ Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 286.

deal is that they attacked Gilead for no good reason and any Ephraimite east of the Jordan was there because he went to war against Gilead. Therefore, Gilead was purging Israel of these men.

And so they said to him, “Say, please, Shibbôleth.” And so he said, “Çibbôleth.” And he was not preparing to speak so. And so they seized him and so they slaughtered him unto fords of the Jordan. And so fell in the time the that from Ephraim forty-two thousand.

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So they would say to him, “Say, please, *shibbôleth*.” And he would say, “Çibbôleth.” (He was not prepared to speak right). Then they would seize him and slaughtered him at the fords of the Jordan. So 42,000 fell at that time from Ephraim.

Then the Gileadites would say to him, “Say, if you would, *shibbôleth*.” And he would say, “Çibbôleth.” (As he did not catch the difference). The Gileadites would then slaughter him at that crossing of the Jordan. In all, 42,000 Ephraimites and Manassites were killed by Gilead.

To cross over enemy lines, oft times a password would be established. However, in this situation, there would certainly be people who were not enemies of Gilead who had business there. However, due to the speech patterns which had developed over the years (there does not appear to be a great deal of travel throughout Israel), there were some words which were easily said by the Gileadites and not by the Ephraimites. One of those words was *shibbôleth* (שִׁבְּוֹלֶת) [pronounced *shib-BOH-leth*], which can mean both *flowing stream* and *ears of grain*. It is found in Psalm 69:2, 15 Isa. 27:12 (as well as in Gen. 41:5–7 Ruth 2:2). Strong’s #7641 BDB #987. With the Ephraimites there were one or two problems—either their ears were not attuned to the *sh* sound or they could not pronounce it (or, both). This may seem quite basic to us, but one Vietnamese girl which I had in one of my classes had a name which I could not enunciate correctly and so I used a poor bastardization of her name.. God first confounded the language of man and we have a more difficult time learning the language of another the older that we get. Our pronunciation is highly regionalized and our ability to develop a vocabulary and to make certain sounds and inflections becomes more and more limited with age. What an Ephraimite would say was *çibbôleth* (צִבְּוֹלֶת) [pronounced *sib-BOH-leth*], which possibly means *ear of wheat*, but could also mean *flowing stream*; it is only found here. I opt for the latter meaning. It would seem reasonable that at the ford of the Jordan, the word would be said demonstratively, perhaps pointing to or motioning to the Jordan. Strong’s #5451 BDB #688. All we have here is a regional difference of pronunciation, a simple test of dialect, if you will. The *sh* sound, according to Barnes,⁸ was common among the Arabs, who had more contact with the eastern Israelites. Peter was also betrayed by his dialect in Matt. 26:73.⁹

Two early printed editions follow this with *and he did not distinguish to speak so*. In most manuscripts, we have the negative and the Hiphil imperfect of *kûwn* (the word in question here) (כּוּן) [pronounced *koon*], which appears to mean *erect (to stand up perpendicular)* and, therefore, by application, *to establish, to prepare, to be stabilized*. In the Hiphil, it means *to set up, to erect, to constitute* (when followed by a lâmed), *to appoint, to found, to direct, to aim* (when followed by a lâmed), *to prepare, to make ready*. At first, it may appear that fitting this in will be difficult. It is variously translated *frame* (KJV), *prepared* (Young), *take heed or give attention to* (Rotherham; who points out that some early printed editions have the word *distinguish* here instead), and both Owen and the NASB puppy out by using the word *could*. We will go with *prepare*; the implication being that this caught the average Ephraimite off-guard. Strong’s #3559 BDB #465. This is followed by the lâmed and the Piel infinitive construct of *dâḇvar* (דַּבַּר) [pronounced *dawᶜ-VAHR*], which means *to speak, to declare, to proclaim, to announce*. In the Piel, it is stronger; in this case, the emphasis is upon *enunciation*. Strong’s #1696 BDB #180. This is followed by the adverb *kên* (כֵּן) [pronounced *kane*] is generally rendered *so*. *Kên* also is an adjective which means *right, veritable, honest, upright*. Keil and Delitzsch give the very free rendering *it is correct* in Joshua 2:4. Strong’s #3651 BDB #485.

⁸ Barnes’ Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 449.

⁹ Galileans were not known for their education or their linguistic abilities, which helps to explain Acts 2:6–7.

After they would seize the Ephraimite, then we have the Qal imperfect of *shâchat* (וּחַטַּת) [pronounced *shaw-KHAT*] and it is used primarily for slaughtering animals for a sacrificial offerings (Gen. 37:31 Ex. 12:6 Lev. 3:2). There are a couple of noteworthy exceptions, however. When Abraham is about to kill Isaac, *shâchat* is used (Gen. 22:10). God did not *murder* the Exodus generation, He *slaughtered* them in the desert (Num. 14:16). When Elijah has the prophets of Baal killed, they are slaughtered as with a sacrificial knife (1 Kings 18:40). We also find it used for humans in Judges 12:6 II Kings 25:7 Isa. 9:8 Jer. 39:6 49:37 52:10 Ezek. 16:21 23:39 40:41–42 Hos. 5:2. There is a distinction between this word and the words for *kill*, *execute* and *murder*. This was not simple manslaughter; although the men were being executed, they were not given much of a trial; and, this was not murder, as these were enemies in war. This is not unlike taking a surrendering group of enemies in war and gunning them down, as you have no provisions for dealing with enemy prisoners. It is simply an act of war which at times must take place. Strong's #7819 (7829) BDB #1006.

Obviously, the password could not get out by way of Ephraimites, because they were the ones being slaughtered. However, you are personally concerned with *what about the really nice Ephraimite who just happens to be visiting relatives on that side of the Jordan?* Either his relatives did not let them go back or they were prepared by Gileadites to correctly enunciate the password.

The 42,000 who were killed were killed not only at the fords of the Jordan, but in the war between Israel and Ephraim.

And so judged Jephthah Israel six years and so died Jephthah the Gileadite and so he was buried in cities of Gilead.

Judges
12:7

So Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried by the cities of Gilead.

So Jephthah judged Israel for six years. Then he died and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

The time period that Jephthah ruled as a judge, compared to the time of the Ammonite domination was actually rather short. The significance of the last line is that, during his youth and early adulthood, he was anathema in Gilead, and driven out. In his death, he was buried in his true home.

In the Greek, *city* (or, *town*) is in the singular. However, Gilead is not a city in itself, but a much larger area. My guess is that, given the sketchy information about the judges who will follow Jephthah, that the records did not indicate where exactly Jephthah had been buried. Since the author did not know, he used the plural instead of naming a particular city.

With this verse, we have a new formula for the span of the career of a judge. **And so Jephthah judged Israel six years.** This same formula is repeated in Judges 10:2, 3 12:7, 8, 11, 14 15:20 16:31. The verb is Qal imperfect of *shâphaṭ* (וּשְׁפַחַת) [pronounced *shaw-FAHT*], which means *to judge*, *to govern*. The NIV uses the verb *led*. Strong's #8199 BDB #1047. Prior to this, the formula was: **And the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim** [or, whomever] **eight years** (Judges 3:8b; see also Judges 3:14; also see Judges 4:3 6:1) later followed by: **And the land rested forty years** (Judges 3:11a; see also Judges 3:30 5:31 8:28). Originally, we had a statement of subjugation, the introduction of a deliverer, and this was followed by a time where the land *rested*. That latter verb was the Qal imperfect of *shâqaṭ* (וּשְׁקַחַת) [pronounced *shaw-KAWT*] and it means *to be quiet*, *to be undisturbed*, *inactive*. Strong's #8252 BDB #1052.

Now, I realize that, for most of you, these differences seem insignificant, but you are wrong. Firstly, the book of Judges sets up a shadow of our Lord, our Great Deliverer, our Great Judge, Who was and Who is to come. We first found ourselves in subjugation. For Israel, this was to Rome. For us, this was to Satan and our old sin nature. Jesus Christ came as our Savior, our Deliverer, to lead us out from our being oppressed. He offered Israel rest; he offers us rest. In between our Lord's first and second advents, we have rulership of this world by Satan. One of the remarkable things about this book is that the tabernacle (the tent of worship) and the Sabbath are not even mentioned; the ark of the covenant is mentioned but once. In other words, the Mosaic Law is de-emphasized in this book. The reason for that is that is the book of Judges is a time a great degeneracy for the people of Israel;

however, these things are also not mentioned because this foreshadows what is to come, which will take in the Church Age and the Millennium, the former of which is not subject to the ceremonial laws of Moses. In the book of Judges, in between the changes of terminology, we have rulership by the evil Abimelech (Judges 9). None of the formulas for judging, saving or resting appear in this chapter. He simply rules over Israel for 3 years (Judges 9:23). In our Lord's second advent, He will return *to judge, to govern, to rule*, as did the judges. There will still be our enemy who will return to plague us at the end of the Millennium, whom our Lord Jesus Christ will defeat and cast into the lake of fire. In other words, the very language used here is expressive of our Lord's first and second advents—the very words used here set up an outline of what is to come (by the way, I don't know if *any* expositor has noticed this before).

Secondly, it helps us with authorship. The book of Judges appears to be easily broken down into four or five sections: Judges 1–2, which gives us an introduction; Judges 3–8, where we have the formula *and the land rested for "n" years*; Judges 9—the rulership of Abimelech; Judges 10–16, where the judge judges for so many years; and, finally, the last portion of Judges, where we have an anecdotal history of some of the things which occurred in Israel during the time of the Judges 17–21. The likely scenario is that we have as many as four or five author-editors who put together this material from extent literature from the era. These men certainly lived close to that era and perhaps most of them were participants in some of the history which they recorded. What is quite certain is that there are different authors for Judges 3–9 and 11–16, because of the significant change of formula. The end of this book, the epilogue for the book of the Judges, will also introduce us to a new phrase which is characteristic of that portion of the book (and this we will cover when we come to it).¹⁰

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Ibzan, the Judge with a Lot of Children

McGee: *The next three judges mentioned were practically zeros. They did nothing. Well, they did something, but they did not judge Israel as they should have.*¹¹

And so judged after him Israel Ibzan of Bethlehem. Judges 12:8 **Then, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel after him.**

After Jephthah, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

This may or may not be the Bethlehem that you are thinking about, which is in Judah, due south of Jerusalem. In Joshua 19:5, there is a mention of a Bethlehem in Zebulun, and this could be the same place. Unless we are speaking of a third Bethlehem, this means that the next judge over the eastern portion of Israel was from the west, making that rather significant, given their recent conflict with Ephraim. Zebulun was north of Ephraim and it is possible that a judge ruled over northern and eastern Israel together, which would have taken in Ephraim and Zebulun (among others) as well as eastern Israel. Given that we seem to be focusing in on northern and eastern Israel here, this would make the most sense (when we start examining Samson and the Philistines, we will be moving to Judah and southern Israel). Josephus also affirms that this is not the Bethlehem of Judah.¹²

There are some who have thought Ibzan to be Boaz from the book of Ruth. Ibzan is ^{יִבְזַן} ^ḵib^htsân (יִבְזַן) [pronounced ^hḵv-TSAWN], which is very similar to a city in Issachar. However, we have no idea what the root stands for, if anything. Strong's #78 BDB #7. The name *Boaz* only has the letter bêyth in common with Ibzan, and, at this time, I am unaware of any other similarities between the two men.

¹⁰ No doubt on your quest to read the Bible in one year, you finished these last eight verses in about 28 seconds, missing some of not all of their importance and meaning.

¹¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Joshua Judges*, ©1976 by Thru the Bible Books; p. 184.

¹² Josephus, *Antiquities*; v. 7, 13.

And so he was to him thirty sons and thirty daughters he sent away to the outside and thirty daughters he brought in to his sons from the outside. And so he judged Israel seven years.

Judges
12:9

And it was to him [or, And he had] thirty sons and he sent away thirty daughters [to] the outside. Also, he brought in thirty daughters for his sons from the outside. He judged Israel [for] seven years.

And he had thirty sons. He sent away his thirty daughters outside his realm and brought in thirty daughters from outside his realm to marry his sons. He judged Israel for seven years.

Let's first look at what some others have done with the first line:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	And so it was, he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters sent he abroad, while thirty daughters brought he from abroad for his sons.
NASB	And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters whom he gave [lit., sent outside] in marriage outside <i>the family</i> , and he brought in thirty daughters from outside for his sons.
NIV	He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He gave his daughters away in marriage to those outside his clan, and for his sons he brought in thirty young women as wives from outside his clan.
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	...and he hath thirty sons and thirty daughters he hath sent without and hath brought in to his sons from without; ...

As we have seen before, the phrase *and so it was to him* essentially means *and he had*. First his thirty sons are mentioned. However, his thirty daughters are a part of another clause. The verb for that clause is the 3rd person masculine singular, Piel perfect of *shâlach* (שָׁלַח) [pronounced *shaw-LAHKH*], which means, in the Qal, *to send, to send forth, to send away, to dismiss, to deploy*. In the Piel it means *to send off, to send away, to dismiss, to give over, to cast out, to let go, to set free*. Strong's #7971 BDB #1018. The verb is followed by the definite article and the masculine noun *chûç* (חוּץ) [pronounced *khoos*] and it means *to pity, to look upon with compassion*. Strong's #2347 BDB #299. However, this word, after a verb of motion, has the locale *âh* (אֵה) ending. This is called the *he locale*, which often indicates direction and puts somewhat of an adverbial spin on the noun. Essentially, it answers the question *where?*

With the next *thirty daughters*, we have the 3rd person masculine singular, Hiphil perfect of *bôw'* (בָּוֵא) [pronounced *boh*], which means *to come in, to come, to go in, to go*. It means *to bring something, to carry* when found in the Hiphil. Strong's #935 BDB #97. This verb is followed by *for his sons from the outside*.

All that occurred is that he sent thirty of his daughters outside the area in which he judged and he brought in daughters from outside that area for his sons. It is not clear whether he arranged these marriages between different tribes of Israelites (which appears to be the most likely) or whether such arrangements were made with the surrounding heathen as well. I opt for the former, as the latter would probably have been emphasized.

In case you don't get the obvious, let me spell it out for you. One does not have sixty children by being married to the same person. Iban was a powerful man, and, obviously acquired some wealth in this position. Women are drawn to men of wealth and power. He spent the better part of his time acquiring women and getting them pregnant. If he averaged six children per wife, then he had ten wives. The thrust of his judgeship was not truth and justice; it was the glorification of his power so that he could pick up women.

Furthermore, Iban was not a hands-off father. He did some things for his family. He saw to it that he brought in wives for his sons (it appears that he may have traded his daughters for wives with perhaps men of a similar stature). In other words, he did do a lot for his family (I am saying this in a non-judgmental way; people can do things for their families which are worthwhile and people can do things which are wasted time, money and effort).¹³

¹³ Specifically, I am thinking of giving a 16 year old son a brand new Mustang (or, whatever) on his birthday.

McGee comments on this: *There is a great deal of nonsense abroad today about the subject of responsibility. I once heard the story of a preacher who was on his way to a speaking engagement and his little son wanted to talk with him. He sat down and talked to his son and missed his speaking engagement. Many people applauded him for that. Well, my friend, that man was breaking an engagement and also he was spoiling a child. You can show love and interest in your children without breaking an engagement. There is a time when certain things have to be put first. I think he would have better served the boy if he had told him, "Your daddy has a speaking engagement and that is important. You would want your daddy to keep that appointment, wouldn't you?" I think the little fellow would have agreed. Then the father could have continued, "How when I return, you and I will talk these things over, or tomorrow we can have a chat." That would have done more for the boy than what the father did. All he did was make a spoiled brat out of the youngster, as I see it.*¹⁴

And so died Ibazan and so he was buried in Bethlehem. Judges 12:10 **So Ibazan died and was buried at Bethlehem.**

Finally Ibazan died and he was buried in Bethlehem.

This is somewhat an oddity that he would have originated from Bethlehem either from Zebulun or from Judah, as it appears as though we are speaking of the east side of the Jordan (although northern Israel is also probably under his judgeship. We are not given any more details here to work with, however. We might speculate that in the distribution of his daughters and the importation of his daughters, he was called to be a judge on both sides of the river Jordan.

McGee referred to Ibazan as a picture of mediocrity. You might think that harsh, but he is remembered simply because of his finding wives for his sons and finding husbands for his daughters. No act of judgement and no political act comes to mind from the author's pen.

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Elon, Another Minor Judge

And so judged after him Israel Elon the Zebulunite; and he judged Israel ten years. Judges 12:11 **And Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel after him; he judged Israel ten years.**

Then Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel after him; he functioned as a judge over Israel for ten years.

It is because of this verse that ZPEB speculates that Bethlehem of the previous verse was the Bethlehem in Zebulun. Again, this appears that Elon crossed over the river to judge eastern Israel, or, even more likely, that he judged both sides of the river Jordan. It is quite likely that there was some domination of Ephraim by Gilead (Gad and east Manasseh), and that a judge from that area was used over central and eastern Israel.

Elon was also the name of a sub-tribe or a clan of Zebulun (Gen. 46:14 Num. 26:26). It is not uncommon to name a person after an ancestor, particularly of a notable ancestor. McGee's comment: *These two verse tell us all that we know about Elon. He did nothing—He didn't even have a large family. Apparently all that he did was twiddle his thumbs.*¹⁵

And so died Elon the Zebulunite and so he was buried in Aijalon in a land of Zebulun. Judges 12:12 **Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.**

And Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in Zebulun.

¹⁴ J. Vernon McGee, *Joshua Judges*, ©1976 by Thru the Bible Books; p. 185.

¹⁵ J. Vernon McGee, *Joshua Judges*, ©1976 by Thru the Bible Books; p. 186.

The area over which these judges judged is never made quite clear. It is apparent that they judged over more than one tribe, and possibly over as much as half of Israel. It seems from the succession of birthplaces and places of burial for the ones mentioned that we are speaking of judges who ruled over central and eastern Israel. We are dealing with a succession of judges, as we continually have the phrase *after him*.

The tribe of Zebulun had distinguished itself previously in the war against Jabin and Sisera, leaders of the Canaanites in Judges 4:10-5:18. From the short succession of two judges who appear to have come out of the area of Zebulun, it appears that, for a short time, Zebulun had acquired a certain nobility, at least comparatively speaking.

You will recall that Aijalon was also mentioned in connection with the sun standing still for Joshua in Joshua 10:12 (where we covered that incident in no little detail).

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Abdon, a Judge with a Lot of Children and a Lot of Donkeys

And so judged after him Israel Abdon ben Hillel the Pirathonite. Judges 12:13 **After him, Abdon ben Hillel, the Pirathonite, judged Israel.**

Abdon ben Hillel, the Pirathonite, judged Israel after him.

The first thing that came across my mind is *what the hell is a Pirathonite?* One of David's honored men was a Pirathonite (II Sam. 23:30 I Chron. 11:31-27:14). Some scholars say that Pirathon and Pharathon (of I Macc. 9:50) are two names for the same place. This doesn't help us much, as we find out little about Pharathon in that passage (at best, we know that it *might* be in Judah). Others contend that Abdon's home was 7 miles southwest of Shechem, and is known as Fer'ata, which is a town in a mount belonging to the Amalekites, but was within the Ephraim border. Another suggestion is Fir'on, which is 15 miles west of Shechem. In any case, the judge would have probably come out of Ephraim.¹⁶ Although it is implied that the Pirathon alluded to in this chapter is in Ephraim (see v. 15) and even more clearly stated in I Chron. 27:14, it is not clear from any of my sources where Pharathon is to be found.

And so he was to him forty sons and thirty sons of sons riding upon seventy asses. And so he judged Israel eight years. Judges 12:14 **And he had forty sons and thirty grandsons riding on seventy asses. He judged Israel eight years.**

He had forty sons and thirty grandsons riding on seventy asses. He judged Israel for seven years.

As we saw earlier in the book of Judges, having an ass for a constant mount was the equivalent of giving each of your sons (and, in this case, grandsons) a Mercedes to tool around in. You will recall that this was not unlike Jair, who had thirty sons and whom he gave thirty donkeys (Judges 10:4). Like the other judges, there was little to distinguish him and little to recommend him. What is remembered about him is rather inconsequential.

And so died Abdon ben Hillel the Pirathonite and so he was buried in Pirathon in a land of Ephraim in mountains of the Amalikite. Judges 12:15 **So Abdon ben Hillel, the Pirathonite, died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim in the mountains of the Amalekite.**

¹⁶ There is a theologian named Moore who places Pirathon in Benjamin, which is adjacent to and south of Ephraim. His reasoning is that Abdon is a Benjamite name. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. IV; p. 2400.

Finally, Abdon, the son of Hillel, the Pirathonite, died, and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim in the mountains of the Amalekite.

This verse indicates that there were some Amalekites living in the hill country in Ephraim (also mentioned back in Judges 5:14, but not as clearly stated). Previous to this, the Amalekites were associated with the Negev, the southern, desert portion of Judah (Num. 13:29). We have one major and two minor judges remaining in the book of Judges.

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