

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## JUDGES 9-12

Put down a novel, and it's not the book's preface you're likely to remember – as much as it is the last chapter. Likewise, a good example is forged not by how we start, but by how we finish. This was the case with Israel's fifth judge, Gideon.

When God called Gideon, he referred to him as a “mighty man of valor”.

Though he started out fearful and apprehensive, Gideon took the steps of obedience God required. He learned to trust God in the face of opposition.

When God reduced Gideon's ranks, and still promised Him victory over the mighty Midianites he didn't flinch. He obeyed. And God won a colossal victory. With just 300 troops — *against 450 to 1 odds* - Gideon overcame the 135,000 Midianites in the Valley of Jezreel. It was obvious God had worked a miracle.

Yet rather than worship God as King – Israel offered the throne to Gideon and sons. Gideon refused. The limelight turned on Gideon didn't cause him to forget the lights that won over Midian. Remember, the torches burned through broken vessels. God worked through brokenness. How could Gideon receive exaltation?

So he turned down the crown – *but that didn't stop him from taking the jewels.*

Though, Gideon dared not form a kingdom he still enjoyed living like a king. He took the spoils of war and made an

expensive ephod. He built a huge harem. He sired 70 sons. He even named one “*Abimelech*” which means, “*my father is king*”.

This Abimelech followed in his father’s footsteps...

Not Gideon’s early example of humility, and faith, and obedience, and brokenness – but his latter example of extravagance, luxury, and ambition.

Gideon is now dead, and Abimelech desires the power and prestige his father enjoyed – but he tries to secure it by *taking the throne - making himself king*.

That’s where we begin in chapter 9, “**Then Abimelech the son of Jerubbaal (or Gideon) went to Shechem, to his mother's brothers, and spoke with them and with all the family of the house of his mother's father, saying, "Please speak in the hearing of all the men of Shechem: "Which is better for you, that all 70 of the sons of Jerubbaal reign over you, or that one reign over you?" Remember that I am your own flesh and bone.**” Gideon had 70 sons born by his wives who lived in Ophrah.

Yet 8:31 tells us, “**And his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called Abimelech.**”

Gideon kept a concubine – a girl on the side. When he had a business trip to Shechem she kept him company.

But girls on the side seldom stay there. They have a way of demanding center stage. And this was the case with the concubine’s son, Abimelech. He goes to the men of Shechem and recruits their support. Do they want to be governed by Gideon’s sons living in Ophrah – or by *a home boy* from

Shechem.

“And his mother's brothers spoke all these words concerning him in the hearing of all the men of Shechem; and their heart was inclined to follow Abimelech, for they said, "He is our brother." So they gave him 70 shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith...” Notice the men of Shechem had fallen into idolatry.

They make a campaign contribution from the coffers of Baal-Berith.

And the fact he accepts it reveals Abimelech’s unprincipled character. How can your heart be in tune with God if you’re accepting donations from the devil?

And it should’ve been no surprise what Abimelech does with the money...

“With (it) Abimelech hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him.” He hires a group of rogues and thugs – hit men – who’ll do his dirty work.

“Then he went to his father's house at Ophrah and killed his brothers, the 70 sons of Jerubbaal, on one stone. But Jotham the youngest son of Jerubbaal was left, because he hid himself. And all the men of Shechem gathered together, all of Beth Millo, and they went and made Abimelech king beside the terebinth tree at the pillar that was in Shechem.” And the men of Shechem still supported him.

Despite his gruesome and bloody tactics they still make him their king.

Verse 7 “Now when they told Jotham (Gideon’s youngest son), he went and stood on top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted his voice and cried out. Mount Gerizim overlooked the town of Shechem, and apparently the coronation ceremony. “And he said to them: "Listen to me, you men of Shechem, that God may listen to you!

Jotham challenges both Abimelech and the men of Shechem with a parable. It’s interesting that this is the first recorded parable in the Bible...

"The trees once went forth to anoint a king over them. And they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us!' But the olive tree said to them, 'Should I cease giving my oil, with which they honor God and men, and go to sway over trees?'

"Then the trees said to the fig tree, 'You come and reign over us!' But the fig tree said to them, 'Should I cease my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to sway over trees?' Fruitfulness to God is a much higher calling than sway over men.

"Then the trees said to the vine, 'You come and reign over us!' But the vine said to them, 'Should I cease my new wine, which cheers both God and men, and go to sway over trees?' All three trees were bearing fruit pleasing to God. They didn’t have time to step down from their calling and govern other trees.

The implication is that the wise and godly men in Israel knew that God alone was king over Israel. Only a sinister, selfish bramble would try to take His place.

But the bramble bears no fruit. It’s worthless. Its only

ambition is to rule over other trees. A bramble only grows up to overshadow or choke out good trees.

"Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'You come and reign over us!'

And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in truth you anoint me as king over you, then come and take shelter in my shade; but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon!' Not only was the bramble barren of fruit, but in the summer it became dry and flammable. The bramble could easily catch fire and burn the countryside... Jotham predicts neither the bramble or the trees have pure motives. This little power play over the sons of Gideon will backfire on them both.

Both Abimelech and the men of Shechem will end up getting burned.

"Now therefore, if you have acted in truth and sincerity in making Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done to him as he deserves - for my father fought for you, risked his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; but you have risen up against my father's house this day, and killed his 70 sons on one stone, and made Abimelech, the son of his female servant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother - if then you have acted in truth and sincerity with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you." Obviously, they'd not acted in truth and sincerity toward Jerubbaal. They *butchered* rather than *blessed*.

"But if not, let fire come from Abimelech and devour the men

of Shechem and Beth Millo; and let fire come from the men of Shechem and from Beth Millo and devour Abimelech!" And Jotham ran away and fled; and he went to Beer and dwelt there, for fear of Abimelech his brother." It was a warn and run...

Verse 22 "After Abimelech had reigned over Israel 3 years..." The honeymoon lasted only 3 years. "God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech, that the crime done to the 70 sons of Jerubbaal might be settled and their blood be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the men of Shechem, who aided him in the killing of his brothers." Both parties are about to get burned.

"And the men of Shechem set men in ambush against him on the tops of the mountains, and they robbed all who passed by them along that way; and it was told Abimelech." Any interruption in trade creates a crisis of confidence for the person in charge. The men of Shechem are trying to undermine Abimelech.

And a usurper arises... "Now Gaal the son of Ebed came with his brothers and went over to Shechem; and the men of Shechem put their confidence in him.

So they went out into the fields, and gathered grapes from their vineyards and trod them, and made merry. And they went into the house of their god, and ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech." They all got drunk and started bashing and bad-mouthing Abimelech. "Then Gaal the son of Ebed

said, "Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is not Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem; but why should we serve him? *Gaal has got the gall.* He's arrogant. He challenges Abimelech's authority. *Who needs Abimelech?* Gaal wants to be the leader.

Verse 29 "If only this people were under my authority! Then I would remove Abimelech." So he said to Abimelech, "Increase your army and come out!" It's amazing how brave you can get after a bottle of wine – or a couple of beers...

Gaal calls out Abimelech! He challenges him to a rumble. Let's duke it out.

"When Zebul, the ruler of the city (who was still loyal to Abimelech), heard the words of Gaal the son of Ebed, his anger was aroused. And he sent messengers to Abimelech secretly, saying, "Take note! Gaal the son of Ebed and his brothers have come to Shechem; and here they are, fortifying the city against you.

Now therefore, get up by night, you and the people who are with you, and lie in wait in the field. And it shall be, as soon as the sun is up in the morning, that you shall rise early and rush upon the city; and when he and the people who are with him come out against you, you may then do to them as you find opportunity."

So Abimelech and all the people who were with him rose by night, and lay in wait against Shechem in four companies. When Gaal the son of Ebed went out and stood in the entrance to the city gate, Abimelech and the people who were



with him rose from lying in wait. And when Gaal saw the people, he said to Zebul, "Look, people are coming down from the tops of the mountains!"

But Zebul said to him, "You see the shadows of the mountains as if they were men." *Ah, you're imagination is running wild... All you're seeing are shadows.*

So Gaal spoke again and said, "See, people are coming down from the center of the land, and another company is coming from the Diviners' Terebinth Tree."

"Then Zebul said to him, "Where indeed is your mouth now, with which you said, 'Who is Abimelech, that we should serve him?' Okay, big mouth. Where are your boasts now? You want to fight Abimelech... have at it! "Are not these the people whom you despised? Go out, if you will, and fight with them now."

"So Gaal went out, leading the men of Shechem, and fought with Abimelech. And Abimelech chased him, and he fled from him; and many fell wounded, to the very entrance of the gate. Then Abimelech dwelt at Arumah, and Zebul drove out Gaal and his brothers, so that they would not dwell in Shechem." Abimelech will attack Shechem three times. In the first attack he drives out Gaal and his family.

And it came about on the next day that the people went out into the field, and they told Abimelech. So he took his people, divided them into 3 companies, and lay in wait in the field. And he looked, and there were the people, coming out of the city; and he rose against them and attacked them.

Then Abimelech and the company that was with him rushed



forward and stood at the entrance of the gate of the city; and the other two companies rushed upon all who were in the fields and killed them. So Abimelech fought against the city all that day; he took the city and killed the people who were in it; and he demolished the city and sowed it with salt.” In his second assault on Shechem, Abimelech slaughters the people of the city. He even “sows *it with salt*” - a gesture of disdain and judgment. Ground sowed with salt became worthless.

Verse 46 “Now when all the men of the tower of Shechem had heard that, they entered the stronghold of the temple of the god Berith.” The last few survivors flee to the tower that was dedicated to the idol Baal-Berith. “And it was told Abimelech that all the men of the tower of Shechem were gathered together.

Then Abimelech went up to Mount Zalmon, he and all the people who were with him. And Abimelech took an ax in his hand and cut down a bough (limb) from the trees, and took it and laid it on his shoulder; then he said to the people who were with him, "What you have seen me do, make haste and do as I have done."

So each of the people likewise cut down his own bough and followed Abimelech, put them against the stronghold, and set the stronghold on fire above them (they started a bonfire with the branches), so that all the people of the tower of Shechem died, about a thousand men and women.” They were cremated alive.

Jotham warned the men of Shechem if they followed Abimelech they would get burned... and that is exactly what

happened. The tower became an incinerator.

*But what about God's judgment on Abimelech?*

Verse 50 “Then Abimelech went to Thebez, and he encamped against Thebez and took it. But there was a strong tower in the city, and all the men and women - all the people of the city - fled there and shut themselves in; then they went up to the top of the tower. So Abimelech came as far as the tower and fought against it; and he drew near the door of the tower to burn it with fire.” His strategy was the same in Thebez as it had been in Shechem. He wants to torch the tower.

“But a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head...”

An upper millstone was smaller than a lower millstone, but it was still two feet in diameter and a foot thick. Imagine somebody dropping a small tombstone on your head from a window 30 feet high... As the Bible says, it “crushed his skull.”

Isn't this fitting... once more the king gets crowned! Not even a BC powder will help this headache. Abimelech died from *a big head – in more ways than one.*

“Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.' " His request shows you how concerned Abimelech was with image and status.

“So his young man thrust him through, and he died. And when the men of Israel saw that Abimelech was dead, they departed, every man to his place.

Thus God repaid the wickedness of Abimelech, which he

had done to his father by killing his 70 brothers. And all the evil of the men of Shechem God returned on their own heads, and on them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal.”

God may call you to leadership - but always remember the ambition of a God-led leader is to *serve* - *not rule*. Only a bramble sets out to rule over people.

Chapter 10 “After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in the mountains of Ephraim. He judged Israel 23 years; and he died and was buried in Shamir.

Tola was “the son of Dodo” – probably a claim my three sons could make.

Actually the name “*Tola*” means “*worm*”. He may have been a wormy, inferior person, but God is into using “*worms*” and “*dodos*” to accomplish His purposes.

“After him arose Jair, a Gileadite; and he judged Israel 22 years. Now he had 30 sons who rode on 30 donkeys; they also had 30 towns” And guess what jersey number he wore during his HS football days? He was a fullback. I think it was 45...

Jair’s 30 towns were “called “*Havoth Jair*” (which means “*towns of Jair*”) to this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died and was buried in Camon.”

Tola and Jair judged Israel for a combined 45 years.

Verse 6 “Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD...” Sadly, this phrase gets repeated seven times in the book of Judges.

“And (Israel) served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon” Tyre and Sidon were the chief cities of the Phoenicians – a sea-faring people who settled on the coast of Lebanon. Which reminds me, *what do you call a visually impaired Sidonian?* Of course, a Phoenician blind!

Israel also served “the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.”

It sounds like the children of Israel served everyone, but the one true God.

Of course that’s no surprise. It’s been said, “Once a person rejects the truth there’s no end to the foolishness they will believe.” Scientists today are concluding that evolution is a hoax. Life necessitates a Life Giver. But rather than consider the God of the Bible - they’re more inclined to chalk it up to aliens from another world.

They’d rather believe in science fiction than the verifiable claims of Scripture.

Israel worshipped every god, but the true God. Vs 7 “So the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon. From that year they harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for 18 years - all the children of Israel who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead.” (east of the Jordan.)

But their oppression also stretched to the west bank. “Moreover the people of Ammon crossed over the Jordan to fight against Judah also, against Benjamin, and against the

house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.”

“And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, “We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!”

So the LORD said to the children of Israel, “Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines? Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand. Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more.

Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress.” God is frustrated with Israel. He’s saying, “*Every time I drive out your enemies you thank me by serving other gods. Let them deliver you!*”

God is tired of Israel’s ingratitude and betrayal.

And I wonder how this applies to us? *Have we ever cried out to God?* He came to our rescue. And we thanked Him by praising Him one night, then ignoring Him and brushing Him off for the next few months – until the next crisis occurred...

Is God saying to us tonight, “*Cry out to your television - or the job you worship - or the people with whom you party... Let them help you in your time of distress.*”

Hey, the truth hurts. It pierces our hearts.

In verse 15 Israel shows real repentance, “**And the children of Israel said to the LORD, “We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we**

**pray."** Here's the sign of true repentance. It not only turns from sin, but accepts its consequences. It says, "**Do to us what seems best to You...**"

In other words, if we need to punish us, punish us. Discipline us if necessary. But just don't let us die outside of Your blessing - please "**deliver us, we pray.**"

And I love God's response. Verse 16 "**So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.**" This is so much like God... Yes, Israel had frustrated and betrayed the Lord. But He's too merciful to let *our sin* quench *His love*.

When I recall the ways I've taken God for granted – and misused His grace - it breaks my heart, and scares me spitless. But I can be sure the pain I've caused Him hasn't stopped Him from loving me. *His soul can't endure our misery.*

Remember the cycle that gets repeated through the book of Judges?

Israel **sins** and worships idols... A nation conquers them and makes them **slaves**... They cry out to God in **supplication** and ask for His help... God raises up a **Savior**, or Judge, to deliver Israel. God empowers this Judge with His **Spirit**, and He overthrows the enemy. His victory is followed by a period of **serenity** and peace... Only to be interrupted by another round of *sin, servitude, supplication, savior, Spirit, and serenity*... This cycle gets repeated seven times in Judges.

But the question arises - *how many times has this cycle*



*been repeated in your life?* What was cyclical for Israel is a pattern for people today. I know folks who are always either *getting in* or *getting out* of trouble. If we stay focused on Jesus we'll experience consistent victory – not the ups and downs that plagued Israel.

Chapter 11 begins with another round of sin and enslavement...

Verse 17 “Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled together and encamped in Mizpah.

And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, "Who is the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." And chapter 11:1 answers their question...

“Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah. Gilead's wife bore sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out, and said to him, "You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman."

Jephthah was a man of outstanding qualities, but his character was overlooked by his parentage. He was a bastard child - a son of a harlot. And his half-brothers wouldn't let him forget it... they were the legitimate children - not Jephthah.

But understand with God there are no illegitimate or accidental children.

God is the giver of life – and every human being is valued by God. It's tragic that any man or woman would be judged by



the circumstances of his birth or the mistakes of his parents... *issues over which he has no control*. Dr. Martin Luther King's famous line, "Judge a man not by the color of his skin, but by the content of his character..." should also be expanded to include the legitimacy of his birth.

Today, you hear businesses brag about being equal opportunity employers, but the only person void of all bigotry and prejudice is God. If you're born again, God looks past the birth certificate. He's the one true equal opportunity employer!

And here God *recruits* a man everyone else *rejects*... His name is *Jephthah*.

Verse 3 "Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob; and worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out raiding with him."

Jephthah failed to find acceptance among God's people so he went out and found it among worthless men. Could it be the bars and brothels and bath-houses of Metro Atlanta are filled tonight with people who like Jephthah have sought to find acceptance and love among the people of God...but were rejected?

The need for friendship has driven them to hang out with worthless people.

Hey, we're the Church – the body of Christ – we're not a *hotel for saints*, we're a *hospital for sinners*. We're *Grady Memorial* not the *Westin Peachtree Plaza*.

Our Lord Jesus was known as a *friend of sinners*. The despised and rejected flocked to Him. Jesus embodied God's

love. The same should be true of us!

Vs 4 “It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Israel. And so it was, when the people of Ammon made war against Israel, that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. Then they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon."

The elders shunned Jephthah until they needed him.

A fierce battle was ahead. It required a man of courage, and skill, and daring. All of a sudden Jephthah’s pedigree didn’t matter as much as the strength of his character and his steely nerves. They summon Jephthah to lead them into battle.

“So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?"

“And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." We’re all of the same color and pedigree in a foxhole. In the heat of battle - or in the wake of a disaster – folks put aside their pettiness and pull together. There’s no prejudice in a crunch.

So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the LORD delivers them to me, shall I be your head?" *When the battle is over will they still want him to be their leader?*

“And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD will

be a witness between us, if we do not do according to your words." Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD in Mizpah.

Verse 12 "Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, saying, "What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land?" At first Jephthah tries to avoid bloodshed and try some diplomacy.

"And the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and to the Jordan. Now therefore, restore those lands peaceably."

From verses 14-23 Jephthah rebukes the king's claim with a history lesson.

He recounts Israel's past victory over the Amorites. Israel's land acquisition didn't come at the expense of Ammon. Their land was the spoils of battle.

Israel took possession of only the land God enabled them to conquer.

In verse 24 Jephthah appeals to logic. He asks the king of Ammon, "Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God takes possession of before us, we will possess."

In a sense, Jephthah philosophy was "winners keepers, losers weepers."

Chemosh was the god of the Ammonites – a false god - but

to prove his point he asks the king if his god gives him a victory isn't it his right to take the spoils? Likewise if the God of Israel gives a victory – the winner takes possession.

Follow that logic today and Israel should occupy the Siani, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights all the way to Damascus, and southern Lebanon.

“And now, are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he ever fight against them? While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon, for 300 years, why did you not recover them within that time?”

The Ammonite king was trying to claim land the Hebrews had occupied for 3 centuries. If they really thought it was theirs why not make it an issue before now.

Verse 27 “Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the LORD, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon.” However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him.” The diplomacy fails.

Verse 29 “Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon.” Jephthah is full of the Holy Spirit – supernatural power courses through him. Jephthah is ready to fight battles for God - do God's mighty works - be a force for God's kingdom.

But sadly, spiritual anointing and power doesn't make us immune to sin.

We'll see that the power of the Holy Spirit doesn't stop Samson from lusting after women. It doesn't stop Paul and Barnabas from arguing and splitting up over a dispute. It doesn't stop the Church in Corinth from petty divisions and carnality...

And it doesn't stop Jephthah from making a rash and foolish vow.

Guys, we need the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It provides us power, but it's not an instant ticket to holiness. Godly living and moral purity is a work of God's Spirit, but it also involves my submission to God's will - and the renewing of my mind with God's Word - and the preservation of a humble, repentant attitude.

In verse 30 Jephthah prays a prayer he never had to pray...

**"And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."**

Jephthah is making the same mistake Christians make today. It's a works trip...

*God, I'll do this - or sacrifice that – if you'll come through!  
God, if you bless me with that sale - or help me win the game  
- or let me receive that award I'll return the favor with an  
offering of my own. I'll scratch God's back if He scratches my*

back. People love to play tit for tat with God. Hey, it's not biblical. It's not wise.

All God's gifts are a result of His grace! God wants us to *believe... not barter.*

Look at what happens... **“So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the LORD delivered them into his hands. And he defeated them from Aroer as far as Minnith - 20 cities - and to Abel Keramim, with a very great slaughter. Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.”**

I believe God would've given Israel victory over Ammon even if Jephthah had not made a rash vow. God loves us. He's gracious and wants to bless His people.

*But Jephthah made his vow – and a good Hebrew keeps his VOWS...*

Verse 34 is a tough pill to swallow - **“When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter...”** Daddy's little princess – his only daughter – his only child - was so happy to see him she came running out the house to greet him, and celebrate his victory... She came out of the house **“with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter.**

**And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes...”** He made a vow he couldn't break. He promised God the first object that came from the doors of his house... I'm sure he was thinking a lamb, or a goat... but not his princess.

**“And (Jephthah) said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought**

me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it." So she said to him, "My father, if you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon."

Some people have suggested Jephthah offered his daughter as a literal burnt offering – a human sacrifice, but we know from his message to the king of Ammon Jephthah was familiar with the Mosaic Law. And the Law forbid human sacrifice.

What's more likely is that he turned his daughter over to the serve in the Tabernacle. She would remain a virgin, and serve only the Lord.

This is why the sorrow she expresses in verses 38-39 concerns her perpetual celibacy – not a loss of her life. "Then she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I." In other words, give time to mourn - and bury all my little girl dreams of marriage and family.

"So he said, "Go." And he sent her away for two months; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man." It was as if she entered the convent.

"And it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of



## Jephthah the Gileadite.”

In chapter 12 a civil war erupts between the tribes of Gad and Ephraim.

“Then the men of Ephraim gathered together, crossed over toward Zaphon, and said to Jephthah, “Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you with fire!” The Ephraimites are at it again... In 8:1 they make the same complaint to Gideon... These people were always *brave after the battle...*

Jephthah lived in Gad or Gilead, east of the Jordan – and he’d led the Gadites against Ammon. The tribe of Ephraim lived on the west bank. They’re now angry they were left out of the conflict. They wanted in on the action...

“And Jephthah said to them, “My people and I were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon; and when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands.” Jephthah claims he asked them for help, but they didn’t respond.

The Ephraimites remind me of church folks who always show up after the job is finished. Then pout “*Why didn’t you call me? How come I never get to serve?*”

Hey, a loving heart anticipates needs. An eager servant hears of opportunities.

The church today is plagued with Ephraimites – people who criticize after the fact... Don’t be an *armchair quarterback* or a *Monday morning coach*. Be a Gileadite. Know the needs. Take the initiative. Don’t wait to be asked.

“So when I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the people of Ammon; and the LORD delivered them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?” Why is it that some people would rather fight *against the church* than *with the church*?

Now Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites."

The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites arrived.”

Evidently, the battle took place east of the Jordan, so the defeated forces fled westward back across the river – but the Gileadites controlled the crossings...

“And when any Ephraimite who escaped said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," then they would say to him, "Then say, 'Shibboleth!'" The word meant “*flowing stream*”.

And he (the disguised Ephraimite fleeing the battle) would say, "Sibboleth," (he couldn't say the “*sh*” sound) for he could not pronounce it right. Then they would take him and kill him at the fords of the Jordan. There fell at that time 42,000 Ephraimites.” The Ephraimites had a hard time with certain Hebrew sounds.

All the tribes of Israel spoke Hebrew, but the tribes east of the Jordan and the tribes west of the Jordan developed different ways to pronounce certain words.

If you're a Southerner you probably pronounce *r-o-o-f* as "roof". If you're a Northerner you'll probably say "ruf". The same is true with *creek* and *crick*.

The slight difference in articulating a password can reveal your identity.

It's interesting that the word "*shibboleth*" is also in our English dictionary.

It's defined as, "[a test for determining if you belong](#)". It's sad that certain "*shibboleths*" have grown up in the church... "*She doesn't dress the way we do... he doesn't share the hobbies we have... she doesn't listen to our type of music... they don't live in the right neighborhood... that family isn't the right color...*"

Guys, it grieves God's heart when cliques form in the church, and they use their own "*shibboleths*" or code words to decide who's in and who's out.

The human body is a blend of unity and diversity - and so is the body of Christ.

Let's not *resent* our differences - nor even *tolerate* them - let's *celebrate* them.

Our diversity adds to our strength. Rather than develop little "*shibboleths*" to keep people out - let's look for ways to include new people. And by all means let's stay focused on the commonality that transcends our differences - our Lord Jesus!

Verse 7 tells us, “And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in among the cities of Gilead.”

In the last eight verses of chapter 12 we’re told of three more judges...

“After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. He had 30 sons. And he gave away 30 daughters in marriage, and brought in 30 daughters from elsewhere for his sons. He judged Israel seven years.” And during his football playing days in High School he was a fullback, and guess what jersey number he wore?... 30.

“Then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem.”

“After him, Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel. He judged Israel 10 years. And Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.”

“After him, Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel. He had 40 sons and 30 grandsons, who rode on 70 young donkeys. He judged Israel eight years. Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mountains of the Amalekites.”