

More Tragedy.
Judges 12:1-7.
Sunday afternoon, July 31, 2011.

I. Tragic pride.

- A. As if the tragic marring of the Lord's salvation as the result of Jephthah's zeal was not enough, the writer now turns to a whole different set of circumstances surrounding the same salvation the Lord worked for His people.
- B. These would not flow from tragic and misplaced zeal flowing from Jephthah's heart; rather these would result from tragic pride harbored in the hearts of the tribe of Ephraim.

II. Ephraim confronts Jephthah.

- A. Word of Jephthah's great victory over the Ammonites traveled throughout the land, reaching among others the tribe of Ephraim.
- B. One would expect that such news would be welcomed with relief and rejoicing. It created some breathing room for Israel which still faced the threat of the Philistines from the West.
- C. On the whole this news may have been welcomed as such, but in at least one tribal territory it was not; that was the tribe of Ephraim. They were indignant.
- D. Now that the Lord had worked a great victory for Israel, Ephraim believed that they should have been right at center stage in this event, allowing them to bask in the glory of it.
- E. The men of Ephraim gather together and cross the Jordan River to confront Jephthah. Why did you confront the Ammonites without consulting with us first? Why didn't you ask for our assistance? Why did you ignore us?
- F. Ephraim felt left out; probably not so much left out of the battle as left out of the spotlight allowing them to bask in the victory. They are saying: "We are somebodies, and you don't treat somebodies like that!"
Ephraim minces no words; they tell Jephthah that they have come to burn his house down on him, with him in it.
- G. Once before Ephraim had felt slighted. That time it regarded Gideon's victory over the Midianites. He too was sharply reprimanded by Ephraim after the fact. Judges 8:1-3. With a little psychology Gideon had been able to deflect Ephraim's wrath, but Jephthah never had much use for psychology in the land of Tob; as such things turn out very different here, especially so when the men of Ephraim resort to name calling with regards to the Gileadites..

III. Jephthah's reply.

- A. Jephthah had been a nobody all his life; as such he seems unimpressed with those who regard themselves as somebodies, and he is not afraid to answer.
- B. He did invite them to the battle; to no avail however. Ephraim left him in the lurch being a no-show. What Ephraim did not do however, the Lord did, giving Jephthah the victory.
- C. Perhaps the men of Ephraim had expected more of a reasoned approach on the

part of Jephthah with regards to their stated intent to burn his house down over him, and their name calling. Jephthah was no Gideon however; Jephthah decides to answer the stated intentions of Ephraim with the sword.

- D. Jephthah and the Gileadites cut down and scatter the Ephraimites. Next they proceed to occupy all the crossings over the Jordan River, playing password with any Ephraimites who wanted to go West. They were asked to say “shibboleth.” In Ephraim the word was pronounced “Sibboleth,” and the Ephraimites could not say the word the way the Gileadites pronounced it. That day forty two thousand men of Ephraim would lose their lives.

IV. Another look at the Lord’s salvation.

- A. God had worked a great salvation on behalf of His people. The Lord had safeguarded their inheritance; the Lord had subdued their enemies.
- B. Notwithstanding the Lord’s grace and good gifts, which should have been cause for rejoicing throughout the land, the joy which should have marked these days was totally overshadowed by the dark clouds of gloom caused by two things:
1. Excessive and ill informed zeal bringing Jephthah’s only child to her grave; an event that made the national headlines, for all the young women throughout the land marked this event with four days of mourning annually from that time on.
 2. And secondly there were the forty two thousand lifeless bodies that littered the countryside of Gilead and the Eastern bank of the Jordan River.

Application:

What all of this suggest to us falls out into two things:

1. Man, in his fallen state, is prone to mar the salvation, and the good gifts of the Lord.
2. If we are looking for a perfect salvation, we need to look for a greater judge than Jephthah; One who can address, not only man’s outward problems and perplexities, but also, and especially, man’s inward problems of the heart.

V. Another look at the book of Judges.

- A. What we have seen so far in the book of Judges is that it is a story of progressive disintegration:
1. Israel as a nation sinks deeper and deeper into sin and darkness.
 2. The judges of Israel are also marked by more and more negative overtones.
 - Of the six major judges given to us, the first three have no negative remarks. (Othniel, Ehud, and Deborah with Barak).
 - The last three get progressively worse: Gideon with his harem, ephod and Abimelech as successor. Jephthah with his ill advised vow and civil war. And self-sufficient Samson who’s mutilated body we will find at the end of his life in the ruins of Gaza’s temple.

Application:

Notwithstanding these glaring deficiencies, the likes of Gideon, Jephthah and Samson end up in God’s hall of fame in Hebrews 11. They were men of faith, no better than us, and we no better than they; and they are there in Hebrews 11 so that people like us may have hope.