

The Pride Of The Ephraimites

Pride Goes Before a Fall

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Please turn to Proverbs 16 and verse 18.

Proverbs 16:18-19 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Recently, we have been seeing in the news almost every day over the last month, the war with Saddam, and we have had a very good example of what pride produces. We realize that pride produces arrogance, anger, lying, impatience, competition, and fighting. The definition of pride is an undue sense of one's superiority or arrogance. Other words for pride are conceit, smugness, self-importance, haughtiness, overconfidence, and egotism. And the antonym of pride would be humility.

Now, I would like to focus on a story in the Bible, which is another example of pride going before destruction. I would like for you all to please turn to the book of Judges, and I want to read verses 1 through 6. Before I start reading, this is the story of Jephthah, and really the story of Jephthah begins in the 11th chapter. And basically, I just want to summarize for a moment.

Jephthah was a mighty man, the illegitimate son of Gilead, because he was the son of a harlot. And so he was a man that was a man without any inheritance, and he was hated by his family, especially his half-brothers. And the people of Gilead and his brothers drove him out of the land, and he fled to the land of Tob, which is in the area of Samaria or Syria, and he was there for unknown amount of time. But in the course of that time, Ammon went to battle with Israel, wanting the land back that had been taken, that God had given them, the land of the Amorites, and now Ammon was demanding that land. And they needed a leader, and so the people of the Gileadites went to Jephthah and they asked him to be their leader. And he did return to lead them and he was made the captain of their army and then at that point he was

made the leader of the Gileadites. He first tried to negotiate with the Ammonites but without any success, so they did go to war, and he did lead them over through victory for the land of Israel.

The final thing about in this chapter is that he did make a vow to God for a victory that whoever he saw come out his front door that he would offer that as a sacrifice to God and that ended up being his daughter, his only daughter.

Now, beginning in chapter 12, the heading of my Bible says Jephthah's Conflict with Ephraim. Perhaps, I think, a better title for that would be the Pride of the Ephraimites.

Judges 12:1 Then the men of Ephraim gathered together, crossed over toward Zaphon, . . .

A good point about this is that where this crosses over, they actually turned northward. The area of the Gileadites were of three basic tribes: at the top of the Manasseh, middle Gad, the lower section, being Reuben, and this tribe, when they crossed over, they actually turned north. They went directly toward the Manassites, their brother.

Judges 12:1 . . . 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!" 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. So 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 with me?" 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. And when any Ephraimite who escapes said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to them, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," then they would say to him, "Then say, 'Shibboleth!'" And he

would say, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it right. Then they would take him and kill him at the fords of the Jordan. And there fell at that time forty-two thousand Ephraimites.

Now if Jephthah and his armies had just completed this difficult war with the people of Ammon and God did give him the victory, at this point, you would think that the Ephraimites would be ready to give them support, praise, and thanks, and you would think that that would be the order of the day. After such a great battle, a pat on the back for a job well done, and to say thank you for defending Israel against the common enemy. But the Ephraimites were full of pride. They were a proud people with a clouded judgment and an inability to reason properly. And that pride led to the death of 42,000 Ephraimites.

The men of the tribe of Ephraim were very angry with Jephthah. The pride of the Ephraimites caused them to lie and to feel insulted. And even though Jephthah had asked for their cooperation, they were still angry that they did not have a central and esteemed role in the victory of the Amorites. It is apparent that the people of Ephraim were more concerned about getting the credit than seeing a job done. So we see that pride blinded them to the point where they were unable to see God and that God was with Jephthah and the Gileadites.

Pride blinded them so that they were unable to see that God had appointed Jephthah the judge over all of them, and as a leader. And they spoke to him in a very condescending and sarcastic way, and he was innocent of the charges that they were making against him. Pride caused them or prevented them to take to heart the logical and reasonable explanation that Jephthah had given them in the course of his action against this hostile enemy. And pride prevented them from seeing the sacrifice that Jephthah personally made. As you remember when the Ephraimites came to him they were mad and angry.

But at this point in Jephthah's life, he was probably very upset. He had made a vow to God when he said that whoever comes out of my door, I will sacrifice. And that was his daughter. And if her sacrifice was then to die or just to live out her days in the service of the Temple, she was still the only daughter he had, and he did feel a great loss. If the Ephraimites have been

displaying a proper character, they would have seen the sacrifice and would consoled him. They would have thanked him for a job well done. They would have mourned with him and gave him the proper support that he needed. Instead, they could only see their own needs and their own interests.

Focusing on ourselves will prevent us from seeing the needs of our brethren around us. Pride caused them to think that they were superior to their brothers. The Ephraimites looked at the Gileadites as fugitives and scum and outcasts of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and perhaps this is the reason that they would not follow Jephthah when he asked for their help with the people of Ammon. Perhaps they felt that they were above him, that this illegitimate man that was the son of a harlot was just too much below them, and again they were blinded as to where God was working and who God had chosen.

And as we see in verse 4, that they called the Gileadites fugitives. But the very next verse, we see them fleeing as fugitives and that that pride that they had displayed was quieted as they crossed over the Jordan River trying to escape. And when they asked them when they were crossing over, are you an Ephraimite?, that pride was all gone because they said no. But when they misspoke, they were still killed. Their pride had all run out. It is clear that God had humbled them. And this pride again resulted in the death of 42,000 Ephraimites.

So there are lessons here for us to learn. Pride stirs up strife and anger, but through humility, there is peace and unity. Pride hinders us from seeing God and what God is doing. Pride cuts us off to the point that we do not see where God is working, and in what direction He is leading His people. Pride separates us from the brethren, and instead of being a strength and a valued friend and ally, especially in times of trouble and trials, you find yourself to be of value to no one.

Pride will prevent you from having a humble attitude and serving but we must serve without concern of praise or reward, but we must always remember that it is impossible to outgive God. So pride prevents us from giving proper support, praise, and thanks. All the components of strengthening a brother.

Proverbs 28:25 He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered.

It is easy to understand then why Jephthah is listed in Hebrews 11:32 with the men of faith. He was rejected by his own family and people, but still, he came back and led the people that had rejected him. And led them to a victory. He was willing to return and protect those that rejected him. He first sought peace with the people of Ammon and then he sought peace with Ephraimites—those that even threatened to kill him and burn him down in his own house. When they went out to battle, he asked God to lead them, and he was willing to give God the glory for their victory.

Now the day of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread have just ended. And at the Passover, Christ showed the disciples and us today a lesson in humility by washing the feet of the disciples, putting away pride. In this solemn ceremony we are shown unity with God and unity with our brethren through humility and service.

So let us always be ready to give support to our brethren, that support and praise and thanks that they need. We must strive to be a strength to one another.