

WAR IN THE HOUSE OF JOSEPH

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The children of Israel had civil war among her tribes on several occasions. One of these situations occurred in the time of Jephthah, one Israel's judges. Judges 12:1-3 says, "*And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire. And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands. And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the Lord delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?*"

Angry words

The Ephraimites provoked the Gileadites with disparaging words. "*Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites*" (Judg 12:4). So often, harsh and angry words are involved in the stirring up of anger and strife. James 3:3-6 says, "Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." Proverbs 15:1 tells us the choice that we all have, and teaches us a way to make peace rather than cause strife: "*A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.*" Ephesians 4:29 says, "*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*" And Colossians 4:6 says, "*Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every*

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(continued)

man.” But what caused the men of Ephraim to speak so harshly to their brethren?

Who can stand before envy?

The root cause of the problem between Ephraim and Jephthah was jealousy. They were jealous of Jephthah’s success against the Ammonites and were willing to fight and destroy their own brethren because of it. James 3:16 truly states: *“For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.”* But this was not unusual behavior by the people of Ephraim. Ephraim was a tribe given to envy. This was seen in the time of Gideon when the Ephraimites angrily confronted Gideon for not having called them at the beginning to the battle with Midian (Judg 7:23-8:3). Many centuries later, Ephraim’s tendency to envy Judah was mentioned by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 11:13). Envy motivated the men of Ephraim to level a false accusation and a terrible threat against Jephthah. *“And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? we will burn thine house upon thee with fire”* (Judg 12:1). Jephthah was unable to assuage Ephraim’s envy. Proverbs 27:4 says, *“Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?”* Many righteous people have indeed fallen before envy. Envy was the motivating factor behind the the selling of Joseph into slavery (Gen 37:11; Acts 7:9), the crucifixion of Christ (Matt 27:18; Mark 15:10), the stoning of the apostle Paul (Acts 13:45 + 14:19), and the riot caused by the Jews in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-10). The battle between Ephraim and Jephthah and the Gileadites is just one more example of the destructive force of jealousy. In mentioning Ephraim’s traditional envy, Isaiah prophesied of the end of envy among the citizens of spiritual Israel, the church of Christ (Isa 11:10-16). We need to make sure that we are part of the fulfillment of that prophecy, or else we will pay the eternal consequences (Rom 1:29-32; 13:13-14; 1 Cor 3:3; 2 Cor 12:20-21; Gal 5:19-21,26; 1 Tim 6:3-5; Titus 3:3-5; Jas 3:13-18; 1 Pet 2:1-3).