

rebellion and weren't as faithful and righteous as the Ephraimites were (of course, remember that they'd been granted this land by God through Moses in **NM 32**).

They expected Jephthah to roll over, trusting their numbers and power. But they were about to learn how wrong they were. *Now Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim (JG 12.4a)*

JG 12.5a ~ *The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites arrived. And when any Ephraimite who escaped said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?"*

EX: The Gileadites block the river and after the Ephraimites were defeated, they are turned **"fugitive"**, themselves (the same word for **"fugitive"** that they used as an insult against the Gileadites was used to describe them in **vs. 5: "escaped"**). To help identify the invading Ephraimites, they employed a test: **"say 'Shibboleth'"**.

JG 12.5b-6 ~ *If he said, "No," ⁶ 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. There fell at that time forty-two thousand Ephraimites.*

EX: The word, **"shibboleth"** was likely Hebrew word for **"stream"** or **"floods"** (though, there is some debate about that). And in the Ephraimite dialogue, they'd drop the **"sh"** sound, saying **"sibboleth"**, instead. So, like Peter in **MT 26.73**, they were betrayed by their speech. This small pronunciation error would quickly identify the enemy from the ally—allowing them to wipe out 42,000 invading Ephraimites and ensure that they'd never again rise up in prideful arrogance against God's leaders in the era of the Judges.

AP: In this **civil war** and **method of authentication**, we see an illustration pointing to the importance of being able to identify God's enemies. **The simplest method?** Their words, their deeds, and their fruit: *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. (MT 7.15-20)*

CONCLUSION

After Ephraim's defeat, the next 31 years were years of peace and security. Jephthah's reign as judge was one of the final truly peaceful times for the Jewish people—his reign would be followed by Samson: a judge who served in violence and blood.

LANGUAGE/Shibboleth/Definition

We are ever and always under attack: in the digital space, and in the spiritual one, as well. But in example of the Ephraimites, we see a lesson in how to approach these kinds of attacks: first, **responding with a soft answer**—giving the enemy a chance to be reached with kindness and with respect. But should that fail and the attacks **escalate**, the next step is **an honest answer**—pointing out the truth, even if it's difficult and controversial. And should that escalation continue to the point of open conflict, the correct path is determining a **method of authentication**—pointing to the speech and actions to identify the difference between the enemy and the ally.

CS 4.5-6 ~ *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*

INVITATION

#657 [Exp-OTH]
08/07/2025

Say "Shibboleth"

PC ___ Pchd _____

JG 12.1-7

QUESTION: How ought we to respond when we're under attack?

TRN TO JG 8

INTRODUCTION

ILL—Password Resets (one of the most common requests for a Help Desk team; can make up 20-50% of all requests!) As a result, it's been something that I've been pushing to address—after all, if I could cut out half of the work my team has to do in a day, **why wouldn't I do it?**

Of course, there's a few different ways to do that. And one of the most often requested methods is to just get rid of passwords, altogether. People hate passwords—and there's nothing more frustrating than having to change your password for the 73rd time—changing **"password123"** to **"password123!"** But there's a problem with that: whether you realize it or not, you're constantly under attack. And it's important to keep yourself and your data protected.

In truth, the way we make our passwords required tends to result in people doing insecure things: making their passwords easy to remember and, often, easy to guess. Writing our passwords down and taping them under our keyboards. All of these things defeat the purpose of a password.

SECURITY/Computer/Shibboleth Protocol

Born out of a desire to both simplify and increase security, its name may sound a bit familiar to the Bible student. By requiring the authentication to **"Say 'Shibboleth'"**, it could verify that a resource was what it said it was: proving its authenticity and reliability, and therefore, allowing itself entry into secure and proprietary resources.

Where did this term come from? What did it mean? And what can it mean for us today? While the answer is found in **JG 12** and the judge, Jephthah, to truly understand its context, we have to go back a bit further: to an earlier judge we may be a bit more familiar with: Gideon.

BD1: The Soft Answer of Gideon (JG 8.1-3)

ILL—Pins and Face Recognition (most have something like it on our PCs and phones; when setting up your devices, they prompt you to set one up) This is how security naturally begins—asking **gently and softly** for you to do the right and secure thing.

Perhaps you remember Gideon: his encounter with the angel of the Lord in the winepress as he was threshing out the grain, the miraculous acceptance of his offering, his request for the sign of the fleece, and the winnowing of his army from 32,000, to 10,000, to 300, and his subsequent victory over the Midianites. Most of our study of his story ends in **JG 7**. But his story isn't quite over yet. Following his victory over the Midianites, he is confronted by people who should have been allies: men from the tribe of Ephraim.

JG 8.1-3 ~ *Then the men of Ephraim said to him, "What is this that you have done to us, not to call us when you went to fight against Midian?" And they accused him fiercely.*

BKGRND: At this time, the Ephraimites were a large tribe: second only to the tribe of Judah in size. And they were considered to be a **"brother"** tribe to the tribe

of Manasseh, Gideon's tribe of origin. They saw Gideon's failure to bring them to battle as a slight—an insult to their pride. Of course, that same pride that was injured by Gideon's failure to call them to join the battle would have been incensed by God's winnowing down in the previous chapter.

PS 133.1-3 ~ *Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! ² It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! ³ It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.*

Unfortunately, by following the commands of God, Gideon had unknowingly insulted his brother. And this was potentially dangerous: the tribes of Israel weren't exactly cohesive at the time, and to have the mighty Ephraim tribe offended could quickly result in a civil war. **How would Gideon respond?**

JG 8.2-3a ~ *And he said to them, "What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the grape harvest of Abiezer? ³ God has given into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. What have I been able to do in comparison with you?"*

EX: Rather than responding in rage or anger or rebuking them, Gideon's response was one of diplomacy and flattery: with the **soft answer of Gideon**. **"Oh, what I did? That's nothing compared to the might of Ephraim; your grape harvests are better; God has given you great victories against Midian, Oreb, and Zeeb; what does it matter if you've missed out on this one battle when compared to your other great victories!"** And it works! *Then their anger against him subsided when he said this. (JG 8.3b)*

PV 15.1-4 ~ *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. ² The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly. ³ The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good. ⁴ A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.*

AP: It had to be frustrating for Gideon to walk away in this tough situation—to speak calm, patient, and wise words when confronted by an ignorant and arrogant complaint. But he does it. **And why?** The Bible doesn't specify. But I think the reason is because Gideon valued peace with his brethren and obedience to his God more than his own pride.

MT 5.9 ~ *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."*

And this example is hard for us to follow: we sometimes find people standing, stubbornly against us—being difficult and arrogant and forceful because we're not doing things **"their way"**. But in those cases, Gideon stands as an example of trusting, faithful, and humble peacemaking. The first proper response to those causing strife amongst God's people is by following the example of **the soft answer of Gideon**—starting calmly and patiently speaking with those in opposition before it becomes a problem.

PV 17.14 ~ *The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.*

BD2: The Escalation of Ephraim and the Honest Answer of Jephthah (JG 12.1-3a)

ILL—Requiring Strong Passwords (most common passwords: "123456", "password", and "qwerty"; now, lots of sites force a strong password: calling you out on your "weak" password) While any password is better than none, there comes a

point where they have to point out the truth: that what you're doing, now, isn't good enough.

By the time we come to **JG 12**, over 50 years had passed and three additional judges have come and gone. But now, we see Jephthah: a judge best known for his rash vow in **JG 11**. But following his victory over Ammonites, **guess who comes back on the scene?**

JG 12.1 ~ *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!"*

EX: Wow, let's just say things escalated a bit. They come to Jephthah with the same complaint that they'd brought to Gideon 50 years before: **"How dare you not bring us along for the fight? We're gonna burn down your house!"**

How would this new judge react? Would he continue to speak a quiet word back at the threatening Ephraimites? Yeah, the answer here is **"no"**.

JG 12.2-3a ~ *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. ³ 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?"*

EX: Jephthah responds bluntly: **"We asked for your help, and you didn't come. You only want a part in the victory—you didn't want a part in the work!"** The **soft answer of Gideon** had served to bring peace at the moment, but as time went on, **Ephraim escalated** their complaint and Jephthah wasn't having any of it. He provides an **honest answer** to a dishonest people.

PV 24.24-26 ~ *Whoever says to the wicked, "You are in the right," will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations, ²⁵ but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them. ²⁶ Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips.*

AP: While flattery and soft answers are valuable, there comes a point where an honest answer is required. Jephthah does that, here: being forthright and honest with the people of Ephraim—calling them out on their lies and their false premise. And the same is the natural next step of conflict—while we may start with a **soft answer**, when that doesn't work—when the complaints and conflict **escalates**, the next step is an **honest one**. We need to tell the truth—even if it can be a bit harsh.

EH 4.25 ~ *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

BD3: A Civil War and a Method of Authentication (JG 12.3b-7)

ILL—MFA (finally realizing passwords will never work, someone came up with a new idea; a secondary authentication push to prove they are who they say they are) I have three unique ways to receive these on my phone—it's more secure, but not the best.

JG 12.3b ~ *Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?"* It appears that the **escalation** of the **Ephraimites** wasn't an empty one. They'd marched up ready to go to war against the **"insult"** of not being brought into the battle against the Ammonites. They even resorted to name calling: *"You Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites."* (**JG 12.4b**)

EX: That doesn't sound so bad to us, today. But basically, they were saying that they were cowards and rebels: that they'd stayed on the other side of the river out of