

S(h)ibboleth

“Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth...” (Judges 12:6)

This tactic used by Jephthah to detect Ephraimites reveals more than just a linguistic difference between people—it points also to a believer’s ability to recognize the voice of Jesus. We read in the opening verses of the previous chapter in Judges that Jephthah was an illegitimate son of Gilead having been born to a harlot, and that Gilead was of the tribe of Manasseh, which made Jephthah an heir to God’s covenant with Abraham. Despite this connection to the same Godly covenant as them, Jephthah’s half-brothers cast him out of their family, *“... they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman. Then Jephthah fled from his brethren...”* (Judges 11:2-3). As is often the case where God chooses the *“base things of the world, and things which are despised”* (1 Cor 1:28), this exiled man later became the eighth judge of Israel, largely because of his military prowess, *“...the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob: And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon”* (Judges 11:5-6) and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, he handily defeated the Ammonites who previously had attacked Israel.

This account could have ended here but for the curious attack from the tribe of Ephraim, *“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”* (Judges 12:1). Our first impression might be that the Ephraimites were extremely offended at not having had the opportunity to fight alongside their brethren against a common enemy. However, Jephthah’s explanation, that he did call for help but they did not respond, fell on deaf ears. Here is where it gets most interesting because rather than debating their point of view with Jephthah they revealed their real issue against him by accused him of defecting from them, *“Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites”* (Judges 12:4).

They were correct in their accusation that not only did the half tribe of Manasseh, along with Reuben and Gad, choose to live apart from the nine and a half tribes that crossed the Jordan River under Joshua’s leadership, but also that Jephthah himself was not even considered worthy by his own family. Thus, there were some deep-rooted, longstanding emotional hurts between these two tribes, so much so, that reconciliation was not possible, *“Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim...”* (Judges 12:4). As the Ephraimites retreated Jephthah blocked the only escape route across the Jordan River and killed all who could not answer the question, *“And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand”* (Judges 12:5-6).

Jephthah faced and defeated two enemies: one from the outside world and the other from within his own family. Today the elect of God still face these same enemies. It is one thing to face those who openly confront our faith—as did Jephthah when he had to fight the Ammonites—but it is quite another thing to identify those who oppose us from within our own family, church or familiar surroundings. In Jephthah’s situation, this familial enemy went into hiding, no longer showing its true colors, perhaps thinking to live for another opportunity to attack from within. Jephthah could not identify this enemy until he heard them speak. Believers today must be able to use that same detection tool, *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God...”* (1 John 4:1). If we approach God in earnest prayer he promises to give us the discernment to recognize His voice, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”* (John 10:27).

God’s peace,
Charles Korhonen

May 3	Ken Storm	Holy Communion
May 10	Nathan Ruonavaara	
May 17	Ken Storm	Medical Care 2pm
May 20	Semi Annual Mtg	7pm
May 23	Spring Cleaning	9am
May 24	Charles Korhonen	
May 31	Herb Jarvi	

Special Notice

Due to rising expenses we find it necessary to make a special appeal for donations to our church general fund. Those who wish to give may send donations to Tapiola Apostolic Lutheran Church, Jon Lehtinen, Treasurer, P.O. Box 531, Houghton, MI 49931. May God bless your kindness.

TAPIOLA APOSTOLIC LUTHERAN CHURCH
P.O. Box 531
Houghton, MI 49931

Online Broadcasts

From our webpage: <http://www.tapiolachurch.org/> you will see the mixlr live audio – we will be 'live on the air' during our church services. Previous sermons are archived.

Looking ahead

The Sunday School picnic will be June 21st at Twin Lakes State Park beginning at 10:30am. All are welcome.

Fall/Winter Worship Schedule (we change to our Summer Schedule after Memorial Day)

Sunday School and Adult Bible Study 9:45am
Sunday Service 11:00am.
Wednesday Bible Study 7pm