

- *Four kinds of leadership*

1. Jephthah became too much of a tyrant - he was over-concerned with control

- *Determined to carry through the victory over the Ephraimites to a savage end*

- *42,000 Ephraimites killed*

- *Jephthah was an autocrat who could not stand rivals*

2. Ibzan was a multi-tribalist - concerned with national unity

- *Inter-clan marriage encouraged to promote unity*

- *Tribalism takes many forms*

- *Small minded parochialism is dangerous*

Judges chapter 12 brings Jephthah's story to an end ^{☐1} and tells us of three more judges ^{☐2}. The four men give us a glimpse of four kinds of leadership, and four kinds of personality.

1. **Jephthah became too much of a tyrant; he was over-concerned with control.** His tyranny began with his resisting a domineering spirit among the Ephraimites ^{☐1}. They were furious that Jephthah, son of a harlot, should have got such a victory against Ammon without consulting the Ephraimites! So they marched northward determined to exterminate Jephthah's family! But Jephthah had become quite domineering himself. There was no way he would yield to them. He reminds them of what they had forgotten. 'I gave you an invitation to join us but at that time you refused. Now you complain. Actually I risked my life in the battle and you were not there to help!' Ephraim started the battle but Jephthah is willing to violently resist Ephraim's ambitious spirit. He gathers his men and commences battle against the Ephraimites ^{☐2}. Then he is determined to carry through the victory to a savage end. Jephthah's men defeat the warriors of Ephraim and then stand guard over the river-crossings ready to catch any Ephraimites seeking to escape back to their home. They have a simple way of finding out who is an Ephraimite. The people of Ephraim used a pronunciation which had no 'sh' sound, and a 'sh' sound is difficult to pronounce if it is not in your mother tongue. The people of Ephraim could not say a word with 'sh' in it – just as some struggle to say the English 'th'.

Any person crossing the river was asked to say 'shibboleth'. If he could not say it but said 'sibboleth' instead, they knew he was an Ephraimite ^{☐1}. In this way forty-two thousand Ephraimites were caught and killed.

The story of Jephthah ends with a note that he ruled for six years and was honourably buried in Gilead ^{☐1}. But the story of Jephthah does not have a happy ending. He did not like the domineering spirit of the Ephraimites, but he himself went much too far in punishing them and wiping them out of existence as much as he could. The truth was he had a domineering spirit himself at this point. He could not bear a rival, certainly not one who wished to domineer, and took his determination to be free of anyone's control much too far. He was an autocrat determined to exterminate other autocrats.

2. **Ibzan was a multi-tribalist; he was concerned with national unity.** He was convinced that multi-tribal marriage was the answer to Israel's needs ^{☐1}. He got his own family to practise inter-clan marriage. It was a way of trying to get Israel to be a united country rather than one divided up by tribal interests. Those of us who live in Africa can learn something from it! But there are other forms of 'tribalism'. Many countries have factional disputes. There is the rich clan and the poor clan, the university clan and the not-so-educated clan who despise the posh accent. Tribalism takes many forms.

Ibzan saw the problem and resolved to do what he could about it. He persuaded his family to forget the idea of staying within their own clan, and encouraged them to develop wider interests and even to get married 'outside the clan'. Small- minded parochialism is dangerous for a leader, dangerous for a country, and dangerous for the church of

^{☐1} 12:1-7
^{☐2} 12:8-15

^{☐1} 12:1

^{☐2} 12:4

^{☐1} 12:5-6

^{☐1} 12:7

^{☐1} 12:8-10

Jesus Christ. For God might be working powerfully in another circle of Christians other than our own – in another clan we might say.

3. Elon was a traditionalist; he was concerned with keeping things as they had been for a long time

• No achievements to look back on

3. Elon was a traditionalist; he was concerned with keeping things as they had been for a long time. Elon is known only for living, dying and getting buried! The two verses of Judges 12:11–12 tell us nothing more. One wonders why a leader of Israel should be mentioned at all if he was only known for living, dying and getting buried. He was a leader of Israel so the writer felt he had to be mentioned. Yet nothing of his story is told, presumably because there was not much to tell. There are some people whose temperament is such that they just want to keep things going as they are. Their weakness is passivity. When their life is all over, they have lived, they have had a title as 'leader' but nothing much has changed. They get an honourable burial, but no one ever looks back to them as having achieved very much.

4. Abdon was a communicator; concerned to keep everyone well informed throughout the land

• Four personalities – four leadership styles

4. Abdon was a communicator; he was concerned to keep everyone well informed throughout the land. Abdon was famous for having sons and grandsons who rode on donkeys ¹. This is not so odd as it might seem. He mobilized his family to travel around the land. People everywhere would get to see his sons and his grandsons travelling around on donkeys. It was not that he and his family were eager to be powerful and rich. Horses were known for being expensive and for being used for warfare and battle ². But asses or donkeys were cheaper. Horses were used for war. Asses and donkeys were used for travel and communication. The picture is one of a family who got around, travelled far and wide in their community and found out what was going on.

So the four men introduce us to four types of personality, four styles of leadership. One became a dictator; one was the very opposite passively letting circumstances dictate to him; two of them were much wiser watching over the unity of the nation and keeping themselves well-informed.

• Jesus – the greatest leader

A Christian inevitably compares all four men to Jesus, the greatest leader and the Head of the people of God ruling from the right-hand of the Father. He is firm but not dictatorial. He likes us to 'wish' to follow Him. He is taking His church to where He wants it to go. He is not happy just to 'keep the wheels turning'. Above all He wants His people to be one, knowing each other, well-informed about each other, one body, one holy nation under Jesus.

¹ 12:13-15

² see Joshua 11:4 and elsewhere



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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