

HANDLING CONTENTION

Gideon divided his army of 300 into three units of 100 to attack the coalition army from three sides (7:16). However, Gideon needed the Ephraimites for his plan of attack to succeed. Gideon's plan was to drive the Coalition army southward down the Jordan valley towards the Ephraimites in order to trap them (7:17-24).

"Fleeing by way of the Jordan Valley, the Midianites were trapped when the Ephraimites seized the fords of the Jordan from below Beth Shan to Beth Barah near Adam." (NIV, Gideon Battle)

"Gideon needed the aid of the Ephraimites to cut off the retreat of the Midianites into the Jordan Valley." (NIV, Judges 7:24)

We will study our lesson text by the following four homiletical points.

- Cut off (7:24) Midianites by Ephraimites
- Captured (7:25) Midianite leaders killed by Ephraimites
- Contention (8:1) Ephraimites over strategy of Gideon's war plans
- Conciliation (8:2-3) Gideon's humility diplomacy with Ephraimites

The Ephraimites joined the fight against the coalition army but not without CONTENTION with Gideon.

"Then the men of Ephraim said to him, 'what is the thing you have done to us, not calling us when you went to fight against Midian?'"

- And they contended (rib / kal impf) with him vigorously (chazeqah / to rebuke severely)." (8:1, NAS)
- And they criticized him sharply (NIV, 8:1)
- And they quarreled with him furiously (8:1, Amplified)

**This lesson will study FIVE aspects of how Gideon successfully
HANDLED THE CONTENTION of the Ephraimites**

1. Later during the reign of Jephthah the Gileadite (9th Judge), there was a similar contention with the Ephraimites but with different results (Judges 12:1-7).

Israel was at war with the Ammonites and had defeated them when the Ephraimites contended with Jephthah. This is a character flaw of the Ephraimites as a culture. Apparently, they didn't learn the spiritual lesson from Gideon (5th Judge).

We will study this contention by the following four homiletical points.

- Problem – contention and threats by Ephraimites (12:1)
- Proposition – offer of conciliation (12:2-4)
- Pass word – pronunciation of shibboleth not sibboleth (flood) (12:5)
- Perish – 42,000 killed (12:6-7)

"Apparently the Israelites east of the Jordan pronounced its initials letters with a strong "sh" sound, while those in Canaan gave it a softer "s" sound. Peter was similarly betrayed by his accent (Matt.26:73)." (NIV, Judges 12:6)

2. Jephthah would have been wise to use humility diplomacy like Gideon rather than humiliation diplomacy.

Jephthah used humiliation diplomacy – “I called, you didn’t save me out of their hands. Now why have you come up today to fight me? Jephthah then called together the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim.” (12:1-4)

Gideon used humility diplomacy – “What have I accomplished compared to you? Aren’t the gleanings (leftover) of Ephraim’s grapes better than the full grape of Abiezer (Gideon’s clan)? God gave Oreb (raven) and Zeeb (wolf), the Midianite leaders, into your hands. What was I able to do compared to you? At this their resentment against him subsided.” (8:2-3)

“Here Gideon implies that Ephraim has accomplished more than he and all the other forces involved in the initial attack.” (NIV, 8:2)

Note the difference in results between these two methods of resolving contention and strife. Which one accomplished the better good of the nation?

3. When the Israelites contended with Moses, he saw it as against the Lord rather than against himself – “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to the test? (Ex.17: 2; 17:1-7).

Therefore Moses took it directly to the Lord – “Then Moses cried to the Lord, ‘What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.’” (17:4)

The Lord answered the prayer by resolving the problem as well as the contention (17:5-7).

Moses called the place Massah (testing) and Meribah (contention / quarrel) “because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” (17:7)

The writer of Hebrew explains that the spiritual problem behind the contention was reversionism of OMCD (Heb.3:7-19; Ps.95:7-11). “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert.” (Heb.3:7-8)

4. OMCD is behind such contention and strife and must be put off and a grace mental attitude put on in order to change the old man pattern of thinking and behaving in CWL (Eph.4: 22-24).

Let me offer two more examples of contention / strife type problem of OMCD thinking.

- Martha’s complaining about sister in Luke 10:38-40.
- Older brother complaining about younger brother in Luke 15:29-32.

5. The grace way to handle contention in CWL is humility diplomacy and gentle words.

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Prov.15: 1, 18; 17:14; 20:3; 26:21) [humble not grumble / Phil.2:14-16]

Notice Jesus’ grace handling of Martha – “Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’” (Luke 10:41-42)

Notice Father’s grace handling of older brother – “My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” (Luke 15:31-32)