

The importance of correct pronunciation essay



Throughout history there has been a strong need to express words clearly. Time has shown that even the simplest mistake in pronunciation has led to the loss of life as well as great confusion. If we are to be effective in this world, we must speak clearly and precisely. In chapter 12 of Judges, we see that this was no different for the Ephraimites. This passage of scripture states that 42, 000 men of this tribe were put to death by the mispronunciation of the word "shibboleth." There were a few factors that precipitated this event.

One factor that we encounter is that of the Ephraimites. The Ephraimites shared the same border, the same God, and many of the same customs. They do, however, seem a little bit different from the Gileadites. Their language was the same but their dialect was a bit different. They also appear to be very brash in their mannerisms. Even Gideon had a few problems with this tribe when he went to battle with the Midianites. We see this recorded in Judges, chapter 8, "Then the Ephraimites said to him, "What have you done to us not to call us when you went to fight against the Midianites?" And they upbraided him violently." Not much has changed since the time of Gideon because they are in the same situation again with someone else. It appears that they were only willing to take offense, at not being invited into battle, only if the Israelites were victorious.

Jephthah was a person whom his tribe needed desperately even though he had a few character flaws that worked against him. In Judges, chapter 11, we see that he was one that did not easily give in to pressure, and was very stubborn. This is shown in two instances. First, when he was asked to lead the battle against the Ammonites, he quickly questioned the fact that he was

sent away because he was the son of a prostitute. Jephthah only continued when they vowed at Mizpah to make him their leader. Secondly, we see though a long explanation, the reason why Israel was allowed to inhabit the land. Only when Jephthah received no reply did he decide to attack. Yet another character trait that Jephthah possessed was that he could be unpredictable. This is clearly shown when he made a foolish vow to sacrifice the first thing that came through his household doors.

Jephthah was victorious over the Ammonites and their oppression was stopped. Under normal circumstances there should have been great rejoicing within the land of Israel. This was, however, not the case. When the Ephraimites heard of the victory, they became upset that they were not invited to the battle. Jephthah, however, tells them that they were invited but did not send anyone to the battle. It is clear that there was some bad communication, but regardless of this dilemma, the result is clear. When two groups of people come together, who are strong willed, and have opposing objectives, the result is generally war. Jephthah had no tolerance for excuses and summarily went to war with the Ephraimites and the Ephraimites quickly lost.

When they tried to escape across the Jordan river, their escape route was quickly cut off and they were required to pass a simple but an effective test, in order to survive. The Ephraimites were required to say a simple word that would give them away. The word "shibboleth" was apparently easy for the Gileadites to say, but difficult for the Ephraimites to say. If the word "shibboleth" was pronounced then the person was an Ephraimite and was summarily executed.

This is a very tragic story. The tribes of Israel should have been able to get along much better than this story suggests. When we consider all that they have been through together, we should see great joy, great unity, and a strong dedication to God. Unfortunately this is not always the case. We see these people fall away from God on many occasions, and, have many curses fall upon them. We also see that they did not always work together towards a common goal. Sometimes their differences lead to civil war. Even though a victor may have come out of this civil war, the reality was that the whole of Israel lost. This war weakened them as a whole as well as weakened the tribe of Ephraim.

This tragic story teaches us the importance of good, clear communication. These two groups of Israelites had communication problems in two ways. First, when there was a discrepancy in the call to the Ammonites, and secondly, in the dialect pronunciation of the word shibboleth led to a civil war. Christians today need to speak clearly and precisely on the matters concerning God's message. If we use terms that those, outside of Christianity do not understand, then we risk the danger of not communicating the message of God's grace to them. Each culture has its own "shibboleths" and Christianity is no different.

Bibliography: