

Jephthah's Sad Conclusion

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[0 : 00] Tonight, I've called it a sad conclusion, really a sad conclusion.

! I'm not talking so much about Jephthah, I mean I am referring to Jephthah, but really a sad conclusion to the story, his story.

And so let's begin then chapter 12 and we're just going to read seven verses and then we'll come to the end of the biblical account of Jephthah.

Then the men of Ephraim gathered together, crossed over toward Zephon 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. That's pretty serious, isn't it? 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.

[1 : 12] So when I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my own 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?

Now Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim because they said, you Gilead, Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites.

The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites arrived. And then any Ephraimite who escaped said, let me cross over.

The men of Gilead would say to him, are you an Ephraimite? If he said no, 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. And there fell at that time 42,000 Ephraimites.

[2 : 24] And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried among the cities of Gilead. So there ends the story of Jephthah.

Now, remember, Jephthah had led his people to a great victory. Great victory over the oppressors, over the enemy, over those who were threatening to come and conquer their land, their people.

And Jephthah had led the people to a great victory. Victory over the Ammonites, the Ammonites.

And the people, his people, the Gileadites, followed Jephthah.

They were loyal to Jephthah. The Gileadites would have included, by the way, the people of the tribes of Gad and Manasseh. Some of you might have been wondering, well, who are the Gileadites anyway?

I mean, that's not one of the tribes. There was no son of Israel named Gilead. And you would be right. The Gileadites were a combination of Gadites and Manassites.

[3 : 33] Those who dwelt on the eastern side of the Jordan River, the Trans-Jordan, the other side of the Jordan. Remember, there was Gad and the Reubenites and half the tribe of Manasseh.

So they were there. And Gilead was in that area. And they were inhabited by Gadites and Manassites. All right? Gilead is the name of this mountainous, kind of mountainous region, Trans-Jordan, on the other side of the Jordan River.

And it had been divided, again, among the Gadites and the Manassites. And the name of the region likely came from the grandson of Manasseh.

You have to go way back. And Manasseh had a grandson named Gilead. And very likely this region was named after them. I just thought you might need to know all that.

Anyway, Jephthah was used to, was used rather by God to bring deliverance. He was used by God to be a judge, a deliverer.

[4 : 40] And he performed a mighty, mighty thing. Of course, under the power and control of the Holy Spirit of God that came upon him.

And he led the armies of Gilead against the enemies, the Ammonites. And he resoundingly defeated them. And so he was a great leader. But not everyone in history was very impressed with him.

Not everyone accepted his leadership as judge. And it brings up the reality that the judges, all these judges that we've been studying, we talk of them as being judges of Israel.

But they were really regional judges, most of them. And because the enemies would attack certain parts of the Promised Land or the land of Israel.

And these judges would be raised up to deal with the enemy in that particular area. And, but now, there were tribes, other tribes in that local area, more than one tribe.

[5 : 43] And so that's the case here. A particular tribe, very close to Gilead. In fact, just over the river from them. And they were the Ephraimites.

And they weren't going to accept Jephthah's leadership at all. And so the writer of Judges here concludes the account of Jephthah with this kind of sad state of affairs there in this part of the nation.

And it is war, in a sense. Not an all-out war with many battles, but rather just one battle took place. And it was not between Israel and an invading nation.

But this time, of course, it was between Israel and Israel. People of Israel and the people of Israel. Specifically, the Gibeonites. Again, made up of the tribes of Gad and Manasseh.

Against the Ephraimites. Israel against Israel. And so that's why I say this is a really sad conclusion to the story of Jephthah.

[6 : 48] And I want to divide it into three parts. And the first part is this, a serious provocation. First thing we see is a very serious provocation.

The Ephraimites are provoking Jephthah, primarily, but all of his people. Because they were very loyal to him. So there's a serious provocation.

Verse 1 says, then. And so we just need to stop there for a moment. Then. When? When is this? What does it mean, then?

Well, immediately after a great and decisive victory over the Ammonites. Then. Then we have what happens here in verse 1.

Then the men of Ephraim gathered together. That's how it's translated here in the New King James. They gathered together, crossed over toward Zephon.

[7 : 48] Or Zephon. I'm not sure how it's pronounced. And said to Jephthah. All right. So now, I want you to notice that the men of Ephraim had gathered together.

That's the first thing we ought to know. They gathered together. That is, literally, and some versions will bring this out. The men of Ephraim were summoned. I think New American Standard has that word.

The ESV, I believe, says called to arms. So what are we talking about here? Why aren't you talking here about some committee or some delegation that was formed to cross over the river and have this meeting with Jephthah in order to, you know, voice some grievance?

That's not the idea. Ephraim had assembled their men. Their fighting men. They had assembled them. They had summoned them.

Called them to arms. To do battle against Jephthah and the armies of Gilead. That's what the Bible means for us to understand here. The question is, why?

[8 : 50] Why? Well, they said to Jephthah, Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon and did not call us to go with you? That's the reason that they gave for marshaling their troops, you know, to cross over the river.

And to provoke the people of Gilead. Their reason was, you crossed over into our land and fought the Ammonites.

But you didn't call us to come and help you. That seems really pretty petty, doesn't it? In fact, it sounds familiar, doesn't it? If you've been in our study all along, then you've heard something like this already.

In fact, we can go back to the judgeship of Gideon. In chapter 8, the Ephraimites did the exact same thing to Gideon.

And I'll just read that to remind you. In chapter 8, verse 1, Now the men of Ephraim said to him, that's Gideon, Why have you done this to us by not calling us when you went to fight with the Midianites?

[10:00] Exact same thing. I don't know if you remember when we studied that and I mentioned, you know, the pride of the Ephraimites. In fact, it's going to be the pride of the Ephraimites.

That's going to be instrumental later on in the division of Israel from Judah, the divided kingdom.

The Ephraimites are kind of right at the heart of that.

And they have a history of this. They're proud people. They, you know, they have a proud heritage.

And they have had a proud influence over the decades and centuries.

And they were proud of their power and so forth. And so they're doing the same thing with Jephthah that they tried to do with Gideon. But with one significant difference.

They only chided with Gideon. Contended, actually, is the word. They only contended with him. But with Jephthah, they're ready to burn his house down to the ground.

[11:01] With him in it. And we are, to assume, with his family in there, too. To absolutely destroy him. That's what they said. That's what they wanted to do.

We're going to, we will burn your house down on you with fire. We're going to destroy your house. And you and your family. That's a big difference. But really the same kind of pride is showing through with Ephraimites.

Now, did they need their entire army to do that? I mean, think about what they're saying they're going to do. They're speaking to Jephthah.

And I don't think this is just meant to be a generalization. That they really are speaking to all the people of Gilead. Speaking to Jephthah.

And whose house are they threatening to burn down? His house. Do they need, and we're going to find out later. We're talking about a lot of people in this army.

[12:00] Did they really need all of them to come and burn down one man's house. And to kill him and his family. Well, I guess the answer would be that, would be this.

With Jephthah, they did need that. Because it's not just Jephthah. Remember, he commands a mighty army himself. He's got his own little circle. His own little private army that he's been leading for some time.

Kind of mercenaries. And they're very loyal to Jephthah. And, you know, when things started getting tough. And the Gileadites are being threatened by this army from Ammon.

The Ammonites. Who do they call on? Jephthah. And who led them to a great victory? Jephthah did. And so, you're going to come across the river there.

And threaten Jephthah. I'm going to burn your house down. You better come with an army. And that's why they did that. They came with an army. Now, what did they do?

[13:05] They are provoking Jephthah and his loyal men. And all of the people of Gilead. Including his family, of course.

Now, they're all on board with Jephthah. Even though, early on, they kicked him out, remember. His family and all the people, the inhabitants of this region called Gilead.

So, this is a serious, serious provocation. Second, we have a shrewd negotiation. A very shrewd negotiation.

Jephthah, remember, always tried diplomacy first. He always tried diplomacy first. And then, before he ever got to the violence of battle, he tried that with the king of Ammon.

Remember, we studied that. And now, he's going to try this with the Ephraimites. Now, it didn't work with the Ammonites, did it? Well, it's not going to work with the Ephraimites either.

[14:04] So, I guess, when I say shrewd negotiator, he really is. Not necessarily a successful one. But he's very shrewd. Very shrewd in his negotiation. You have to kind of give it to him.

That he would prefer to try negotiation first. Diplomacy first. And so, that's what he tries here. And so, let's just kind of consider here, fairly closely, Jephthah's negotiation.

His shrewd negotiation. And there are kind of several parts to it. In verse 2, the Bible says here, And Jephthah said to them, My people and I.

Actually, that is, I and my people. I don't know why the King James and New King James reverses the order. But, well, it's going to make a difference when we look a little deeper here.

And we'll do that here in just a minute. But it's really, I. I. In fact, really, all throughout this negotiation, Jephthah uses the personal pronoun, I.

[15:02] Quite often. We can make some conclusion from that. He said, I and my people were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon. And when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands.

All right. So, this is his first kind of first line of diplomacy. Or his first point of argument with them. We called for you and you didn't come. All right.

But now, the Hebrew construction. I've read a number of commentaries on this. And it's interesting. They all, pretty much all of them say the same thing. About the confusion here in the construction of the grammar.

Although, most of them, what they said about it didn't make a bit of sense to me.

So, I just kept having to read more because I just, I just have to do that. Find out what's going on here. And most translations, I mean, what it is, it's kind of, it's just bumpy.

[16:04] It's kind of bumpy language. And I'm talking about the literal, kind of from the Hebrew on into English. It makes it almost unreadable.

And so, most translations kind of try to smooth it out a little bit. And they're able to get the gist of it. But they miss one very important point here. And it's interesting.

Because literally, the first part of the sentence, they can't look at your Bibles and say, well, I see that. Because you won't see it there. If you just take a literal translation of the Hebrew text, the first part of it really reads, Jephthah is saying, I am very much contentious.

That's really what, he says, I'm a man of contention. Or we might say he means, I am used to contention. And I'm well versed in that.

And so, it's essentially, he's saying, I'm very much a contentious man. And with my people, we were in great contention with the people of Ammon. All right, so he's really kind of saying two things.

[17:12] I'm pretty familiar with contention. And I and my people have had this big contention, had a big contention with the people of Ammon.

All right, now, so what does all that mean? What does it mean? It's a little confusing. But Jephthah is, first of all, saying to these Ephraimites, he's saying, when it comes to being contentious, you have met your match in me.

Implication, you are contentious people, you Ephraimites. But if you think that I'm not familiar with that and I don't know anything about that, you should know that I am a contentious man and I'm familiar with contention.

And this is a reference, I think, kind of a cloaked reference to the Ephraimites' earlier contention with Gideon. Because chapter 8, verse 1, I read the first part of it, it goes on to say they chided with him.

That's how it's, I think, translated in New King James. But really the idea is they contended with him. They were contentious people. And Jephthah is just reminding them of that.

[18:23] You're contentious people. But I'm here to tell you, you've met your match in me. I'm contentious. That's what he's saying. I'm well acquainted with contentious people.

It takes one to know one. And really think about it. When you think about the history of Jephthah, contention had been his life all the way through. Contention with his own family, first of all.

Contention with his own tribe. Contention then with a foreign enemy, the Ammonites. And now contention with another Israelite tribe, the Ephraimites.

So that's what he's saying first. But getting back to his main line of reason, when you add all of it in there, he is saying, I, we, were in contention, a great struggle, a great contention with the people of Ammon.

And when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands. All right, so now there's no record that Jephthah ever called upon the Ephraimites.

[19:26] And this is perhaps an interesting point to make. And I don't know if anybody could make an argument from silence here. But I guess we'd have to say that either he did call upon them, it's just simply not recorded in Scripture, or he's lying.

And I think we can even go back to Jephthah's negotiation with the king of Ammon, and we can find a few, you know, kind of white lies in there.

What's the difference between a white lie and a real lie? No difference at all. I said that for the benefit of our younger ones in here. That's true. But he kind of bend the truth a little bit.

That same thing as lying too, isn't it? And so Jephthah's not really above lying. And so maybe he's lying at this point. We don't know. It seems like this ought to settle the whole thing.

Hey, what do you mean? Coming over here with your armies to conquer us because we didn't call you when we went to battle against Ammon. We did call you and you didn't show up.

[20 : 29] All right, so this is what he said. This is kind of his first line of argument. Actually, the second one. First, he's saying, hey, you're a contentious bunch of folks, but listen, I know all about that kind of stuff.

I've lived that way all my life. So don't come over here and think you can bully me around. I know what it's all about. And then, you know, by the way, we did have this contention with the Ammonites, and we called you, and you didn't come.

And then, the next one, in his shrewd negotiation, you look at verse 3. So when I saw that you would not deliver me.

See, he keeps talking about himself, and that bothers me. I don't know how much to make of that. But all these personal pronouns. But he's standing in representation of all of the Gileadites.

All right, so, you know, when I saw that you weren't coming, I took my life in my hands. That is, I risked my own neck. And I crossed over against the people of Ammon.

[21 : 38] And by the way, you can make a pretty good case that the Ammonites were just as much the enemies of the Ephraimites as they were of the Gileadites. And so, really, though, it's kind of reading between the lines.

Jeff is saying, we went over there and saved your bacon, too. You know. So what are you talking about? So he's just so shrewd in his negotiation.

And, you know, you didn't come when you were called. And then, in verse 3, again, here's another kind of line of argument. He says, and the Lord delivered them into my hand.

And that's kind of a, kind of a, maybe a snide way of saying, you'd better think twice about coming over here with an army. You know, just consider what the Lord did for us when we went against the Ammonites.

You'd think you're going to fare any better. You see, it's kind of a little line that's thrown out there to hopefully make the Ephraimites think about what they're doing here.

[22 : 41] Maybe this is not such a wise move on their part. And so he says, when they have, why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?

So all of this, this line of argument, this diplomacy, it makes good sense. All right, so we have a serious provocation. That's how it begins.

Ephraimites, they marshal their armies and they cross over the Jordan. That's provocative in and of itself. And then they make this threat, you know, to Jephthah, who's the leader of the armies of Gilead, who have just come from a great victory, a decisive victory, an almost complete annihilation of their enemies, the Ammonites.

All right, so a serious provocation. And instead of Jephthah, they say, okay, let's just, let's just kill them all. He uses diplomacy.

All right, then finally, because the diplomacy didn't work, what I would call a strong retribution. Retribution.

[23 : 51] And what does it all come down to? And this is interesting. And really have to skip to the next verse, to the end of the next verse, in order to discover the Ephraimite response to Jephthah's negotiation.

There at the end of verse 4, they said, you Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites.

That was their response to Jephthah's negotiation. You say, well, what does that mean? Well, I want to tell you that if you remember how we, what it says in the first part of that verse, it was for this statement that they made that Jephthah sent his armies after the Ephraimites and decimated them.

All because they said this. Now, what did they say? Look at it again. You Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites. I mean, that just makes you mad, doesn't it?

Well, it's a little difficult to understand, isn't it? But what it is, is a slur. It is an insult.

[25 : 11] An insult. And it's directed toward Jephthah personally. But also his loyal men, his band of men.

It's directed toward them singularly. And it's a slur. It's an insult. You say, how so? Well, remember, Jephthah had been cast out of his family, remember?

Been kicked out because he, you know, was illegitimate. And his brothers kicked him out. He was ostracized by his community. He lost it all. And then he became the leader of a band of men who were very much like him.

They were kind of outcasts. They were kind of fringe people. They didn't have a family. They didn't have inheritance. And we don't know any of the reasons why. But they were in a similar situation. And he became the leader of this band of men who had nothing, no family, no inheritance, really no nation to speak of in a strict official sense.

[26 : 21] And these were men who had come from various parts of Israel, from the surrounding area. And we assume from the slur that some of them had come from Ephraim.

And, you know, across the river from Gilead. Some had come from Manasseh. Remember, Gilead's made up of the people of two tribes, Manasseh and Gad.

And we assume they came from Gad also, though Gad's not mentioned here. But Manasseh would be the dominant tribe that would have populated the region of Gilead.

And so they had come from all of those areas. And so Ephraim, what are they saying? They're saying, you, Jephthah, and your men, you're a bunch of no-name, no-account, vagabonds, runaways from society.

I mean, and there you are, living among the noble people of Ephraimites and Manassites.

[27 : 35] And you're nothing but a bunch of worthless vagabonds, what you are. It'd be like someone saying, you don't even deserve to call yourself an American.

Wouldn't that kind of get your dander up if you care anything about your country and your citizenship and your love of America? And someone said, well, you're not even a true American. That'd be similar to that, you know. Now, you know, they're going to pay dearly for that. But these Ephraimites, they're going to wish they had never said that.

And so look again at what happens. Verse 4, now Jephthah, this comes before the account of the slur. The slur really comes first. And Jephthah's reaction comes second, of course.

But we have the reaction first and then the slur. He says, now Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim.

[28 : 40] Defeated them. Now, they did not conquer Ephraim, you know. And so now there's no more Ephraim. That's not what this is about.

It means that they defeated their armies that had come across the river and insulted Jephthah, their leader. And Jephthah's valued men.

They resoundingly defeated them. And it gets even worse. And after they defeated their army on the battlefield, Then they took Ephraim, or rather the Gileadites took steps to assure that none of them were able to retreat back over the river to Ephraim.

They not only defeated the enemy on the battlefield, But those who survived and are retreating, they made sure they didn't get back. Now, how did they do that? Well, verse 5.

The Gileadites seized the fords. What's a ford? Well, it's not really per se a bridge, but it's a way to cross over the river.

[29 : 50] Shallow part of the river, whatever. A way to get back. And so they seized them. You couldn't just cross over the Jordan River anywhere you wanted to. I guess you could swim. But the ford.

So they seized them. They put guards on them. And on the Jordan. And before the Ephraimites arrived. Which Ephraimites? Those that had survived the battle.

Those who were returning home. They're defeated. They're conquered. And they're going home. And so they seized the fords before the Ephraimites arrived.

And when any Ephraimite who escaped said, Let me cross over. So they're coming to the ford. There's a guard there. And he says, Halt. And so the Ephraimite says, Let me cross over the Jordan.

And the men of Gilead would then say to him, Are you an Ephraimite? Now how could you tell? If you were an Ephraimite or a Gadite or Manasseh.

[30 : 46] I mean you're all Jews. They can carry passports or IDs and citizenship papers or anything like that. So they're really just saying, Declare yourself here.

And so you could lie about it. Right? Especially those that came a little bit later. And those who had discovered what happens to you if you are an Ephraimite.

Then you might be inclined to just lie. Well no, I'm not an Ephraimite. I'm a Manasseh. Or I'm, you know, from one of the other tribes.

You could just say whatever you wanted to say. And so how would anybody be the wiser? But the Gileadites had a system. And it was pretty ingenious. Verse 5.

If he said no. That is, no I am not a Gileadite. Then how would they know the truth? Verse 6. Then they would say to him.

[31 : 48] Say Shibboleth. That sounds simple enough, doesn't it? Say Shibboleth. And he would say Sibboleth.

Then what would happen? Well, we read a little bit further. They'd kill him right there. Why? That proved that they were from Ephraim.

Because it says there. For he, the Ephraimite, could not pronounce it right. That's pretty interesting, isn't it? I mean, what a dirty, rotten trick.

When you think about it. You know, through, I guess, the evolving of the spoken language. And we're talking about, you know, all of the people of Israel came.

Came there from one person. Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac, and Isaac and Jacob. And so they're all one people.

[32 : 52] But we're talking about centuries have passed now. Hundreds and hundreds of years. And dialects began to form.

And even though they spoke pretty much the same language. There would be differences. And also the way that your mouth would pronounce certain sounds in speech.

Would change. And apparently. I guess we really have to think of this in terms of English. Even though this is not English. But the sound would be the same.

It would cross over from the Hebrew. Hebrew. The Ephraimites could not form the sound SH. They just couldn't do it.

I know that's difficult for us to imagine that. But they could not make that sound. It wasn't a part of any of their vocabulary. And so over the years.

[33 : 50] That ability to make that sound. Had just gone away. Can you imagine that happening? So they couldn't say SHIBILIT. They would say SHIBILIT.

They couldn't pronounce the SH. SHIBILIT. I imagine they tried really hard. And you would think. That well if I've got to.

I would just do it. But you don't have the muscles. You don't have any way to pronounce it. It's just impossible. I guess you might be able to. Over time.

Be able to train yourself. But you know. We're talking about people who are fleeing. The battlefield. And they've got to get back across that river to safety. And they just can't do it.

It's like. And I think I've mentioned this before. I know I have to some of you. In Russia. The Russian speaking people. They cannot.

[34 : 51] Form the TH sound. To save their life. Can't do it. And so. First time I noticed this. I was talking to my translator. And he was talking to me in English.

And he. He said. Something about fate. Fate. And I said. Fate. What? Fate. You know. Fate in Christ.

I said. No. Faith. He said. Fate. No. Faith. Faith. See. See my tongue. Faith.

He said. Faith. Faith. No. That's not. He could not. Form the TH sound. To save his life. And the. Ephraimites. Could not. Form the. SH. Sound. To literally. Save their lives. And this was the method. They. They came. Up with. So what.

[35 : 51] Happened to these people. Who got it wrong. Verse 6. Then they would. Take him. And kill him. At the fords. Of the Jordan. There.

Fell. At that time. Forty. Two. Thousand. Ephraimites. Wow. Forty.

Israel. Fighting Israel. And the Gileadites. Destroyed. The lives of. Forty. Two.

Thousand. Ephraimites. That's why I say. What a sad. Conclusion. It really is sad. And the question. You know. The question is. Was God. In. Any part. Of this. And. I don't say no. God is. Sovereign.

[36 : 44] In his. Providence. And we can't ever say. That God is. Uninvolved. But. What I'm talking about. Is. Jeff. The. You know. He gave some lip service. To God. At one point. In his negotiation. That Yahweh.

Gave us. The. The. The. The. The. Victory. I think. It was just simply. To. Help him. With his. Negotiation. Kind of. Name dropper. You know.

Maybe that would make it. A little bit more persuasive. But that's the only time. We have. Yahweh mentioned. God doesn't seem to be. Anywhere. In this final account. Of. Jephthah's. Judgeship. Jephthah did not.

Call upon God. For help. Here. He's kind of using his own. Ingenuity. And intellect. And. Diplomacy. Ability. To be a diplomat. And. And. There's no word. At all. About him. Calling upon the Lord. And. And. And. Jephthah. Also did not.

[37 : 41] Suggest. To the Ephraimites. That. You know. That. That. Maybe. You know. They ought to just. Call upon Yahweh. Here. At this point.

We need to call upon the Lord. Try to. Help us with this. And figure this out. There's no word of that. At all. Here. And. Simply. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I haven't called upon the Lord.

What makes me think that things are going to work out if I don't trust Him and don't seek His counsel and seek His strength? And this is a good lesson for us because it's clear that Jephthah, the people of Gilead, the Ephraimites, and whoever their leader was, there's no one mentioned here, no indication that they called upon the name of the Lord to work all this out.

All right, so then we conclude verse 7. Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in among the cities of Gilead.

You see, it doesn't end on a high note, does it? For most of, I don't know if I could say all because I haven't gone back and considered each one, but for the most part, at the end of the judgeship, or at least throughout the final years of the lives of each of the judges, there's an implication that God's people had returned to the Lord and returned to worshiping Him and Him alone and had forsaken their idols.

[39 : 48] In fact, there are clear statements to that effect, the clothes of some of the judges. But there is no implication, even implied here, that Israel had returned to worshiping the one true God.

It's an indicator of the spiritual condition of God's people.