



Jephthah: the Eighth Judge Judges 10-11

Introduction

Israel's culture was slipping further and further into paganism. This was due to the influence of the idol-worshiping pagan nations around them who evidently absorbed nothing from having God's people in their midst. Unfortunately, it was Israel who absorbed the ways of the ungodly.

Outline of Judges 10 and 11

- I. Jeopardized Tribes' Need for a Deliverer - Judges 10
- II. Jephthah's Rejection and Request - Judges 11:1-11
- III. Jephthah's Victory and Vow - Judges 11:12-40

I. Jeopardized Tribes' Need for a Deliverer - Judges 10

A. Two Judges Briefly Noted - Judges 10:1-5

1. Tola - Israel's Sixth Judge - Judges 10:1-2

After Abimelech's death, Tola arose to save Israel. They needed saving after the abortive reign of the ambition-driven Abimelech, the man who wanted to be king. Even with no enemy oppressing Israel, the people suffered. God raised up Tola to restore peace.

The Bible tells us little about Tola. All we know is that his tribe was Issachar, his father Puah, and his grandfather Dodo. He lived in Shamir, in the mountains of Ephraim and judged Israel for twenty-three years. His restoration of peace and order was noteworthy enough.

2. Jair - Israel's Seventh Judge - Judges 10:3-5

After Tola, Jair judged Israel for twenty-two years. He was a Gileadite from the eastern side of the Jordan River. His distinction was in having thirty sons who rode thirty donkeys and had thirty towns. Nepotism may have begun with Jair.

3. Chronology of the judges

These two judges were successive. Some judges were successive and some judged simultaneously in different areas. Therefore, we do not know the exact number of years covered in the book of Judges, only that it was

more than three hundred (Judges 11:26). Saul's reign (the first king of Israel) is dated at 1070 B.C. with reasonable accuracy. Judges, therefore, covers from about 1370 - 1070 B.C.

B. The Sixth Cycle - Judges 10:6-18

1. Israel's repetition of evil - Judges 10:6

a. *In the sight of the Lord*

While it is true that God sees everything, here the phrase *in the sight of the Lord* means that their deeds had been defined as evil by God. There are man-made rules and there are God's rules. To break man's rules does not necessarily mean that you have broken God's law. A case in point would be the Pharisees's rules regarding the Sabbath as opposed to God's law of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14). Jesus acted contrary to the man-made rules added by the Pharisees but He kept God's law for the Sabbath. On the other hand, you can transgress God's law without necessarily breaking man's law. Some examples of this would be abortion and sexual indulgence outside of marriage, profanity, idolatry, taking care of one's family, etc.

b. *Served the Baals and the Ashtoreths*

Baal and Ashtoreth were the names for the male and female Canaanite gods. They were represented as carved figures depicted in grossly sensual detail and worshipped in obscene ways. The idolatry was widespread. They were the gods of Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines. These nations were located north, south, east, and west of the Israelites.

c. *They forsook the Lord and did not serve Him*

It was not that they merely added these activities to the worship of the Lord God of Israel. They actually stopped worshipping, acknowledging, and serving Him.

2. God's anger - Judges 10:7

God was angry over their sixth cycle of sin and disobedience. So *He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites*, nations to the west and east. There comes a time when God holds us accountable for learning our lesson. How long has God been patient with you?

3. Ammonite oppression - Judges 10:8-9

The story concentrates on the Ammonites to the east and across the Jordan River. The Philistines are put aside for the moment. Samson, the next judge, will deal with them. The Ammonites harassed and oppressed the Israelites in Gilead for eighteen years. Boldly, and to the Israelites' great distress, the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim.

4. Israel's cry to God - Judges 10:10

The Israelites cried and confessed their sin of forsaking God and serving idols. They wanted their misery to end. On the basis of their past performance God had something to say about that.

5. God's first response - Judges 10:11-14

Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, also the Amorites, the Ammonites and the Philistines once before? Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites, and Maonites oppressed them and they cried to God, He delivered them.

Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. God, in His grace, had always delivered Israel before, but there comes a time when God says, "No more". One day even the age of grace in which we live will end. Will there be no more wooing of the Spirit in a sinner's heart and no more open invitation to come to Christ? What if God's invitation to everyone to *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved* were to end today (Acts 16:31)? Would you be safe in His family or would you remain in unbelief?

Go, cry out to the gods which you have chosen, let them deliver you in your time of distress, God told them. Will the things you and I have put ahead of God help us in our times of distress?

6. Israel's desperate reply - Judges 10:15-16

We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best, to you; only deliver us this day we pray. They confessed their sins and put away the foreign gods and served the Lord. Frightened by God's wrath, they seriously confronted their sin and changed their ways.

7. God's mercy

God accepted their fruits of repentance and extended His mercy. The writer of Judges says, *And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.* How serious are you about being right with God and receiving His blessing? What will you put out of your life today? Will

it be a habit, an attitude, or an action toward someone else? Or perhaps some business practice, an idol of success, or self-indulgence needs to go. Our God is a *gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, One who relents from doing harm* (Jonah 4:2).

C. Israel's Cry For a Deliverer - Judges 10:17-18

The Ammonites gathered their forces together and camped in Gilead. The Israelites mustered their forces and camped in Mizpah. The alarmed leaders of the Gileadites looked around for a deliverer, someone to lead them against the Ammonites. They even offered the reward of becoming *over all the inhabitants of Gilead*.

Do you need someone to do battle for you? Everyone needs deliverance from sin, from self, and from Satan. God's ultimate deliverer is Jesus Christ, who *gave himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father* (Galatians 1:4). Is He your Deliverer (Psalm 40:17)?

II. Jephthah's Rejection and Request - Judges 11:1-11

A. Rejected by His Brothers - Judges 11:1-3

1. A mighty man of valor and son of a harlot

Jephthah was born as the result of an encounter between a harlot and a man called Gilead. He lived in Gilead, the area east side of the Jordan River where the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh had settled.

Jephthah is described as a *mighty man of valor*, the greeting given earlier to Gideon by the Angel of the Lord (Judges 6:12). When we are believers in Christ, God sees us complete in Christ (Colossians 2:9).

2. Jephthah's brothers

Gilead married and his wife bore sons. When grown, they drove Jephthah out saying, *You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.* Rejection from one's family is extremely painful. In Abimelech's case, he had done the rejecting of his family. Here Jephthah is on the receiving end. Centuries earlier, Joseph was rejected and tormented by his brothers (Genesis 37:18-20). Both Joseph and Jephthah are like Jesus who was rejected by His brothers and His nation (John 1:11). At the end of His life all His disciples forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:56). David said, *When my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take care of me* (Psalm 27:10). Jesus, who knew what it was to be forsaken, promised, *I will never*

leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). That is more real security than anyone else can give.

3. Jephthah's followers

Jephthah left Gilead, lived in Tob, and gathered a band of ruffians as Abimelech had done. David also, when he was fleeing from Saul, gathered followers who were debtors, the discontented, and the distressed (1 Samuel 22:2). David made mighty warriors out of them. Jesus took twelve young men and turned eleven of them into apostles who turned the Roman world upside down.

Jephthah and his raiders may have been like Robin Hood and his men who stole from the rich and gave to the poor. Jephthah was not intent upon making for himself a path to the top. He was simply trying to live.

C. Requested as Leader - Judges 11:4-10

1. Ammon's attack against Israel

After some time had passed, Ammon made war on Israel.

2. Gilead elders' request for Jephthah

The elders of Gilead went to Jephthah in Tob to ask him to command their armies in the fight against Ammon. He was understandably hesitant. His answer shows his need for explanation and assurance. They had thrown him out when they did not want him. Why were they now asking him to be their leader?

Did you not hate me and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress? It was a good question with an obvious answer. There was no one else who could do the job. Many people are like these elders. They reject Jesus Christ and have no use for Him until they recognize that He is the only one who can fulfill their need.

Jephthah asked, *If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the Lord delivers them to me, shall I be your head?* They answered, *The Lord will be a witness between us, if we do not do according to your words.*

D. Reliance on God - Judges 11:11

Notice Jephthah's faith in God. He counted on the Lord to win the battle (verse 11). *And Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord in Mizpah.* It was at Mizpah that Jacob and Laban vowed to go their separate ways, the Lord watching between them. At Mizpah, Jephthah recognized God as Lord over himself and his words. It is the strength of this commitment that holds him to a rash vow later. Jephthah was not a contributor to the

sixth cycle of disobedience, though he was a victim of it. He became the victor over it. Either our circumstances triumph over us or we triumph over them.

III. Jephthah's Victory and Vow - Judges 11:12-40

A. Victory Over the Ammonites - Judges 11:12-28

1. Basis for the battle - 11:12-26

Jephthah showed wisdom in sending messengers to the Ammonites, asking what this war was all about. *What do you have against me that you have come to fight against me in my land?* It is good to clarify the cause of hostilities.

The Ammonite king answered, *Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt...now therefore restore those lands peaceably.* The Ammonite king was claiming the rights to the land occupied by Israel. (Things have not changed much in Israel to the present day.) Jephthah set the king straight by giving him a history lesson.

It had been two hundred years or more since Israel arrived from Egypt. On their way to the land God had promised, Moses had asked permission to pass peacefully through the land of the Amorites and had been refused. Then Sihon, king of the Amorites, had attacked them. Moses won the battle and the land fairly. Furthermore, the land in question had not been Ammonite land but Amorite land. God had delivered Sihon to Israel, giving Israel possession of the land. Jephthah replied logically to the king of Ammon, *Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the Lord our God takes possession of before us, we will possess.* Jephthah knew Israel's history and Israel's God. He also knew how to deliver a reasonable argument.

2. Victory through God's spirit - 11:27-33

Jephthah declares his moral ground, *Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the Lord, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon.* Jephthah had no doubt about God's will for Israel and for himself. Ammon paid no attention. Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. War ensued and Israel won.

B. Jephthah's Vow - Judges 11:29-40

Going into battle, exhilarated by the Holy Spirit, Jephthah vowed impulsively and rashly, *If you will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of*

my house when I return in peace...shall surely be the Lord's and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.

When he returned home and saw his daughter, his only child, come to meet him with dancing and timbrels, he tore his clothes and said, *Alas, my daughter...I have given my word to the Lord and cannot go back on it.*

His beloved daughter agreed that he must keep his vow and only asked a delay of two months while she bewailed her virginity. He granted her request and carried out his vow. Afterward, it became a custom for the virgins of Israel to lament Jephthah's daughter four days a year.

What actually happened? Experts differ. "Did Jephthah, the eighth judge, actually offer his only child, an unmarried daughter, as a human sacrifice as he had vowed? It fits in with the lawless spirit rampant in the era of Judges. It was in line with the half-pagan background of Jephthah, who would (might) have been following a pagan custom and would not have known or been deterred by the Mosaic Law forbidding such a practice, (this author disagrees) especially since his daughter concurred in the decision. Jephthah's excessive grief bears witness that the sacrifice actually

took place. There is no suggestion in the story that his conduct was sanctioned by the Lord. The notion that her perpetual virginity was a fulfillment of the vow seems to fall short of the scope of the passage" (Unger's Survey of the Bible, Merrill Unger). Note: parentheses in the preceding quote are those of the author of this lesson.

Others take the view that her perpetual virginity made her a living sacrifice, acceptable to God (Romans 12:1). Regardless of what actually happened, there are lessons to be learned: the beauty of the relationship between father and daughter, the seriousness of a vow, and the need for restraint in making a vow.

Applications

1. What vows have you made that you need to keep or reinforce?
2. Where are you falling short of victory because of lack of the power of the Holy Spirit in your life?
3. For what situation do you need Jesus as your Deliverer today?
4. Instead of making excuses, will you rise above your heredity or environment to be the mighty person of valor God created you to be?

QUESTIONS FOR JUDGES/RUTH LESSON 9

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.

1. a. In what ways were Jephthah and Abimelech alike?
- b. In what ways were they different?
2. What did you learn about vows?

DAY TWO: Read Judges 12:1-4.

3. a. Why were the men of Ephraim angry with Jephthah?
- b. What did they threaten to do?
- c. ☆ (Memory Question) Who had the men of Ephraim been angry with before? Why? (Judges 8:1-3)
- d. ? (Thought Question) Why might the men of Ephraim have felt they had a claim to leadership? (See Numbers 13:8 and 16 and 14:30 for help.)
4. How did Jephthah answer Ephraim's complaint? Underline the correct answer(s) below and give the verse where you found each.
 - a. We were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon.
 - b. You didn't come to help when I called you.
 - c. My men and I had to fight the battle without you.
 - d. God delivered the Ammonites into my hand.
5. a. How did the Ephraimites insult the Gileadites?
- b. What was the result?

DAY THREE: Read Judges 12:5-7 and Hebrews 11:32-34.

6. a. After being defeated, the Ephraimites tried to escape back home across the Jordan River where they were met by the men of Gilead. How did the Gileadites determine if a man wanting to cross the river was an Ephraimite?
- b. What did the Gileadites do when they determined that a man was an Ephraimite?
- c. What was the result?
7. Do you ever judge people by the way they speak? If so, in what way?
8. a. What does your speech tell others about you?
- b. What does your speech reveal about your place in God's family?

9. a. How long did Jephthah judge Israel?
- b. From the list of judges in Hebrews 11:32-34, which ones have we studied so far?
- c. From the list of mighty deeds in the Hebrews passage, which ones could be applied to Jephthah?

DAY FOUR: Read Judges 12:8-15.

10. List the next three judges, where each one came from, and how long each one judged.
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
11. a. What more is mentioned about two of the judges?
- b. What would you like people to remember about you?

DAY FIVE: Read Judges 13:1-5.

12. a. How many cycles of disobedience does this make?
- b. Who did the Lord send to oppress Israel this time?
- c. How long did the oppression last?
13. a. To whom did the Angel of the Lord appear? What do you learn about this person?
- b. What good news did the Angel deliver?
- c. What warnings did the Angel give?
- d. What two facts did the Angel reveal about the child who would be born?
14. From Numbers 6:2-8, what was a Nazarite?
15. 🎓 (Senior Review Question) What New Testament person was a Nazarite his whole life? Tell what you know about this person.