

JUDGES

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Judges chapter 11 as we continue our study through the Word of God. This evening we will be looking at the ninth Judge in Israel who ministered in the eastern region of Israel. As we have seen prosperity brought a time of apostasy to the various tribes in Israel, eventually affecting all of them and as they turned from the Lord, God brought judgment upon them by bringing other nations to oppress them.

Then, after a period of time they repented and God raised up a Judge to deliver them from the bondage they were in. And once again they enjoyed a time of peace and prosperity until that Judge died and the cycle continued all over again.

Also, I hope that you are seeing that as we look at these various Judges, many are very unlikely to be called a leader and yet God uses them in a mighty way. That gives me great encouragement and I hope it does the same for you. You see, God is looking for those who love Him and are available for Him to use and He will equip them for the work He has for them. He is not looking for perfect people because there are none!

Now as we concluded last time the children of Israel turned from the Lord and now for eighteen years the Ammonites were oppressing them. And they gathered together at Mizpah in response to this threat of the Ammonites. The problem they had was they had no leader, no one to lead them in battle. There was no one to deliver them. That is where we will pick up our study this evening, in Judges chapter 11, starting in verse 1 and lets see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word and look at this ninth Judge in Israel.

JUDGES 11**VERSES 1-2**

1. Here we have some background information on Jephthah. He lived in the area of Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan River. And like Gideon, he was a “**mighty man of valor.**” Everything seems great so far and then that word, “**but**”. Jephthah was the son of a harlot. Thus, she was not only a harlot but also most likely a Canaanite, that was his mom and her dad, he was a Hebrew!
2. Not only that, but his half-brothers did not want anything to do with him. Yes, Gilead his father raised him as his son but at some point his half-brothers threw him out, they cut him out of the family. Obviously he was not a young child, but he was still tossed out of the home he lived in and it would seem that the main reason is that his half-brothers did not want to share the family inheritance with this half-breed!
3. As good as things started out, it truly doesn't look good right now for God to use a man like this. Folk's, what this world sees as useless, worthless, as nothing, God sees as an instrument that He can use, that He can work through. Don't forget that because He still does that today!

VERSE 3

1. So Jephthah, not welcomed by his family any more, heads to Tob, which was north of Gilead, toward Damascus in Syria. And here he gathers other men and they pillage, looted others to provide for themselves. I get the picture of this being like the Wild West days. And I do realize that some say Jephthah and his men operated much like David and his men when they were fleeing from King Saul. According to Adam Clarke, this word, **“worthless”** doesn’t necessarily mean that they were bandits. He wrote, “The word may, however, mean in this place poor person, without property and without employment.” That may be true but it wasn’t like they were looking for employment and thus, I think they were looting to provide for themselves since they had no resources.

2. In either case, I believe God is building in him the tools he will need to Judge Israel by, to defeat the enemy and he is not even aware of it at this point. Folk’s, God does that in our own lives. How often we go through things, we learn something that we feel is useless, how are we going to use it, it is a waste of time and then, down the road God uses it in our lives to do a great work! Don’t negate the work of God because you can’t see what the purpose for this is right now.

VERSES 4-11

1. Jephthah has been gone for a while now, we don't know how long, and trouble hits the land by the hands of the Ammonites, a group of people who were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. And still there was no leader in Israel and this enemy must have been turning up the heat because they are looking for a leader to help them against this enemy! And these leaders in Manasseh are hearing about this man named Jephthah and what he was able to do. Thus, they swallowed their pride, they ask the one that they threw out to come back and lead them in their battle against the Ammonites.

And you can understand the response of Jephthah to their question. He basically told them, "You've got to be kidding me. You threw me out of my home and left me with absolutely nothing and now when you are in trouble, when you are in distress you come to me for help!" He threw it right back to them, why? Maybe to make sure that this is truly what they wanted. He did not want to help them and then have them throw him out again!

2. Well, the elders of Gilead plead with Jephthah that this is what they want and Jephthah tells them that he will do it and when he is victorious, that they would then make him their head or really their Judge. He will lead them in battle, but he wants more than just that when the battle is over.

3. Now some feel that because he lived in Tob, which was in Syria, that their god's influenced him. And thus, he was heavily involved in idolatry. That is possible but when he speaks of the LORD he is speaking of YAHWEH! Also, when he recounts the history of the children of Israel, he does a great job without any notes. How did he know YAHWEH? How did he know the history of his people? I believe it was because his father taught him, trained him up in the things of God and thus, when he was old he did not depart from them.

What a great lesson for us as parents or even grandparents, to train up our children or grandchild in the things of God. We should instruct them to have a biblical worldview. To teach them the things of God because what they learn they will not forget. They may not always agree, but they will not forget what we have taught them about God in our words and our deeds! It is as Solomon tells us in Proverbs 22:6, "**Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.**" The Living Bible puts it like this, "**Teach a child to choose the right path, and when he is older, he will remain upon it.**" May we do that; train them up in the things of God!

VERSES 12-17

1. As rough and tough as Jephthah was, he did not just go in and blow the enemy away. He tried diplomatic channels first. He tried to talk with them, reason with them. I think that was a wise thing to do, they were family. Moab and Ammon were children of Lot born out of a relationship between his two daughters and he was the nephew of Abraham. And Edom was where Esau lived and Esau was the son of Isaac and the brother of Jacob. So he tried to resolve this family dispute you might say.

2. And Jephthah sent messengers to them asking them why they want to fight. And they basically said that it was all because Israel took their land and they want it back, either peacefully or they will take it by force. And Jephthah replies back by telling them that they are mistaken. It was the people of Edom and Moab who didn't treat the children of Israel kindly as they just wanted to pass through their land on their way to the Promise Land and they would not let them.

VERSES 18-23

1. To put this in perspective of the land location, the Arnon River made the southern boarder of Ammon and flowed into the Dead Sea. The Jabbok River was the northern boundary of Ammon and it flowed into the Jordan River, on the east side of the Jordan River. And maybe the land that the Ammonites were talking about was the land that was taken from them in a previous battle against the Amorites. You see, the Amorites conquered the Ammonites and took their land. Then, when the children of Israel came in and defeated Sihon the king of the Amorites, they took their land, which was previously the land of the Ammonites. Are you with me? Thus, it was not their land for some time, and it was land that had been given to the children of Israel.

2. And notice what Jephthah tells them. "God drove out the Amorites and gave this land to Israel, why in the world do you think it is yours now to possess? You lost it to the Amorites. And Israel, by God's might, took it from them, and thus, the land is ours and not yours!

3. But, like back then we see the same going on today with the so-called Palestinians, which are not even what they claim to be and they claim that the land is theirs! They tell us that they are the descendants of a Palestinian people who lived thousands of years ago in a land called Palestine. You have to be kidding me? Folk's, in all of history there has never been a Palestinian people, government, nation, culture, language, religion, nothing at all. It is all a lie. At least the Ammonites were in the land at one time before the Amorites defeated them. But not these people in Israel today who call themselves Palestinians! God gave the land to the children of Israel and I really don't care what the United Nations or any government says because God trumps all of them!

VERSES 24-25

1. I like what Jephthah does here. He is basically telling them, "Look, be satisfied in what your god has given you. If he short-changed you, complain to him about it and don't complain to me. And don't be jealous because of what our God, YAHWEH has given to us. Yes, He has blessed us abundantly but talk with your god about that one! And see if your god can come up against my God!" In a sense, he threw the gauntlet down or he was challenging them to this battle but they better be sure that they want to get involved, they better be sure that their god will deliver them!

VERSE 26

1. Here is a good point that Jephthah makes. Israel has occupied this land for some 300 years at that point, and thus, if this was such a big deal to them, why did they wait so long to get it back? I think the time has expired for them to take this land back, a land that they lost to the Amorites in the first place!

VERSES 27-28

1. Jephthah warned them not to get involved in this war, the land was Israel's and if they do fight against Israel, God will see the children of Israel through this battle, they will end up being the losers. But the Ammonites will not heed the warning of Jephthah and they will go to war with Israel!

VERSE 29

1. Notice that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, empowering him for this work. How true that is and how it needs to be in our own lives today. You see, as with Jephthah, the Spirit of God comes upon our lives and helps us to advance, to move forward with the Gospel message as we confront the enemy of God and this is all done not in our might or strength but in His!

VERSES 30-31

1. I guess even Spirit filled people can make foolish decisions, foolish vows, as we see here with Jephthah. How can that be? Because the Holy Spirit does not control us like some kind of robots. But the Holy Spirit guides us. Thus, it is that guidance that we can resist or ignore and that can get us in trouble.

2. Now I am not going to deal with this vow that Jephthah made here, but we will deal with it at the end of this chapter as we see it come to pass. But the question here is that did this vow mean that whatever who whoever came out of his home was going to be offered as a burnt offering to God? A very interesting question and again, a very controversial section that I hope I can shed some light on for you. I do think it is clear what took place but you search the Scriptures; see what the Lord shows you.

VERSES 32-33

1. God gave Jephthah and his men a great victory against the Ammonites. And think about this. Jephthah let go of the rejection that his family had towards him, he let go of any bitterness that he might have had towards them, he let go of the difficult life he had because of what they did to him and thus, God was able to use him mightily. I wonder how many times God is not able to use us because we let bitterness, anger, past difficulties, family struggles get in the way? We need to give them to God for the fruit of the Spirit is not bitterness, but **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”** Galatians 5:22-25.

May we let love flow from our lives and see what God can do!

VERSES 34-40

1. Okay, now let's tackle this very controversial vow that Jephthah made. Did Jephthah actually offer his daughter as a human sacrifice to the Lord, a burnt offering? And understand, where he grew up, this kind of sacrifice was common. Or did something else take place here? First of all you can make a good argument for both cases, but I feel that after looking at the character of this man, his understanding of the Law, that he did not offer his daughter as a human sacrifice to the Lord. You may disagree, and that is okay. But listen carefully to the text and see what the Lord shows you.

First of all, as I said Jephthah knew the Word of God, he knew the history of his people as we have seen. Thus, Leviticus 18:21 tells us, **“And you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.”** Also, in Deuteronomy 12:31 we are told, **“You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.”** You see, God does not want human sacrifice, He has not called for human sacrifice, He does not want them to practice that which the pagan nations practiced, human sacrifice! I know, that does not prove it, but I do want to show you what God’s Word says and that I believe from the text we have read, that Jephthah knew God’s Word.

Now here is Jephthah’s vow, **“Whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’S, and (or) I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”** Judges 11:31. First of all he knew the Scriptures, and he knew that God forbade human sacrifice as I have said. He knew the history of Israel and what God required of them. He speaks freely of the Lord and he was Spirit-filled. Now again, all that does not mean he couldn’t stumble and fall into this sin, but I don’t think that he did.

The word “**and**” in verse 31, WAW in the Hebrew, can be translated “or.” And if that is the case, it does change the meaning of this vow. It would read, “**Whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me . . . Shall surely be the LORD’S, or I will offer it up as a burnt offering.**” Jephthah is saying that if a person comes out, they are to be dedicated unto the Lord, to serve Him. If an animal comes out, it would be offered as a burnt offering to the Lord.

Commentator Adam Clarke agreed that according to the most accurate Hebrew scholars, the best translation is “I will consecrate it to the LORD” or “I will offer it for a burnt offering.” As he wrote, “If it be a thing fit for a burnt-offering, it shall be made one; if fit for the service of God, it shall be consecrated to him.”

You see, if he were going to offer his daughter as a burnt offering, he would have to take her to Shiloh, and have a priest do it. Obviously no priest would do that at the tabernacle and if the people got wind of it, they most likely would stop him, but even if they didn’t, I can’t believe that a priest would sacrifice this girl as I have said. Could he have sacrificed her at one of the high places of the pagans? I guess so, but I don’t see that in this man, who is listed in the hall of faith in Hebrews chapter 11! I don’t think God would have listed him there if he offered his daughter as a burnt offering to Him!

Now as he saw his daughter come out, he recognized what this would cost him, for his daughter was now going to spend the rest of her life in service to the Lord. She would not marry, nor have any children, which was a great sacrifice, not only depriving her of children but also Jephthah of having grandchildren. And if she were going to be killed, why would she bewail her virginity instead of her death? You see, she was willing to serve the Lord day and night, a life of sacrifice unto Him. She, in a sense, was married to the Lord. And we do see women serving in this capacity in Exodus 38:8, **“He made the laver of bronze and its base of bronze, from the bronze mirrors of the serving women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.”** And in I Samuel 2:22 we are told, **“Now Eli was very old; and he heard everything his sons did to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.”**

And in the New Testament we are told in Luke 2:36-38, **“Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”**

And thus, we do see that there were women who were set apart for the tabernacle service and even in the New Testament in the temple. That is what might be taking place here with Jephthah's daughter I believe. You see, most likely the women who assembled at the tabernacle and later the temple were older women, widows, but not Jephthah's daughter, she was young and a virgin.

In verse 38 it says that for two months she "**bewailed her virginity.**" If she was going to be sacrificed as a burnt offering I don't think she would bewailing her virginity but her death, as I have said, don't you?

And in verse 39 we read that, "**He carried out his vow with her which he had vowed.**" You see, it never says that he killed her and if he did the daughters of Israel would not "**celebrate**" this time, but would lament. But they celebrate the dedication and faithfulness of this woman as she sacrifices everything to serve the Lord.

So I don't believe that Jephthah had human sacrifice in mind but that his daughter, who came out of his home first, was dedicated to the Lord!

JUDGES 12**VERSE 1**

1. These men of Ephraim are interesting. Once again, after the battle is over they show up complaining that they were not called to assist in this war and they threatened to burn Jephthah's house down! Remember back in Judges chapter 8 they pulled this same thing with Gideon. They complained that they were a strong tribe, mighty warriors and yet Gideon didn't call them to assist in the battle and they were angry with Gideon. And Gideon, instead of blasting them, which he could have done, said to them, “. . . **‘What have I done now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God has delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb. And what was I able to do in comparison with you?’ Then their anger toward him subsided when he said that.**” Judges 8:2-3.

In other words, he told them that what they did far outweighed anything he did and that satisfied them and their anger had subsided. Because of what Gideon did and how the men of Ephraim responded, the work of God could continue on and instead of them fighting against each other they fought against the enemy and defeated the enemy. Now, in saying that, how will Jephthah respond to what the men of Ephraim were now doing? Let's read on and see.

VERSES 2-3

1. Jephthah let's them have it. No soft words spoken here. He blasted them for not coming to the battle when they were called. They stayed on the sidelines and Jephthah went and fought against the enemy and God gave him a great victory over the enemy. Now the men of Ephraim show up and they want the recognition, they want the honor in a battle that they refused to fight in the first place. What a sad picture we see here and yet look at the turmoil that took place because of their actions.

2. In regards to this, listen to what William MacDonald had to say in his commentary on the book of Judges. He wrote:

This type of infighting among the people of God is a distressing thing to see. The blood of the Ephraimites was now mingled with the blood of the Ammonites. Even the bright spots in Judges are smudged with calamity. Ridout makes a sad observation:

Is it not a fact that . . . those who have met and overthrown heresy are those who have then crossed swords with their brethren, and fought over things that were not a vital question of truth?

- William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary, p. 277

It is amazing what Christians fight over. It truly is amazing the silly things that we as Christians battle over. Folk's, the real battle is against the enemy and not with each other. Listen to what Paul said to the Corinthian church, "**And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?**"

I Corinthians 3:1-3.

Why were they fighting with each other? Why was there jealousy among them? Why was there envy between them? Why was there division among them? It is simple, they were carnal, they were walking in the flesh and not the spirit and thus, it was all about them and they had no concern for others. That is not the mind of Christ that is the flesh showing itself and it is not pretty. But Paul clearly shows us these are immature Christians, carnal Christians for he calls them "**brethren**" and he calls them "**babes in Christ.**" In other words, they are not growing up! The Greek word that Paul uses for "**carnal**" is SARKINOS, (sar'-kee-nos) and it speaks of being "characterized by the flesh" or being dominated by the flesh. Folks, we need to understand that the message of the cross is more than justification, it also speaks of our sanctification, but if you are allowing the world to control your life, you will remain carnal, fleshly, you won't grow up in the Lord!

What are we to do? I don't think I need to tell you but listen to what Paul says in Philippians 2:1-5, **“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”**

Instead of manifesting the works of the flesh, put on the mind of Christ, act as He would in the situations you face and as you do, as you submit yourself to the leading of the Holy Spirit who gives to us the mind of Christ, then the fruit of the Spirit will flow from your life! We might not agree on every single issue in the Christian life, and we won't, but does that mean we need to war and fight and bring about divisions because of it? Absolutely not, we need to put on the mind of Christ and let His nature flow not only in us but also through us! And do you know what happens when we do? Then we can do battle against the enemy instead of fighting amongst ourselves! The work of God can continue on!

3. One other point here and that is this. Some Christians, unless they get some kind of recognition, some kind of credit, some kind of acknowledgement for what they are doing, they won't do it. Obviously that is wrong and if that is where you are at, you need to repent and get right and do the work that God has called you to do!

For others, they don't want to do the work they just want to join in when the work is done and the blessings are flowing, they want the rewards even though they did not do the work. Obviously this is wrong also. You may join in and get the recognition from man but God knows what you did and didn't do and in the end, He is the one who will reward us for the work. Don't be foolish as these men in Ephraim were and it was costly for their actions or their lack of action.

VERSES 4-6

1. Jephthah does battle with Ephraim for their words and their lack of action in assisting them. And they set a group of men at the fords of the Jordan River, that is those areas in which you could cross the Jordan, and would catch any enemy that was trying to escape to safety across the Jordan. They were able to tell who was the enemy by getting them to say the word, "SHIBBOLETH." If they could not pronounce it correctly, they were captured. It is kind of like TOMATO and TAMATO or CREEK or CRICK. During World War II, the German soldiers sometimes identified Russian Jews by the way they pronounced the word for corn: "kookoorooza." Their distinctive pronunciation revealed their ethnic background. So it was for these men of Ephraim. And how sad as they let pride, prestige, jealousy got in the way of what God was doing and 42,000 lives were lost!

2. How does that apply to us today? Think about it. When you talk about Jesus people can tell something about you. When you talk about the Bible people will see something about you. How we speak, what comes from our lips, will show people where our faith is at, what we believe. They will be able to tell if we are an enemy of Jesus just speaking forth His name but not knowing Him or if we are true believers!

VERSE 7

1. So Jephthah only judged Israel for six years before he died. Not a long time but he was able to deliver Israel from their bondage at the hands of the Ammonites. You see, it is not the amount of time that matters it is how you use the time that you have for the Lord!

VERSES 8-10

1. Now, with the remaining Judges the focus is in the western region of Israel. Ibzan is the next Judge and he judged Israel for seven years and then he died. That is all we know of this Judge and yet God has placed him here for us to read about and thus, he must have been an instrument that God worked through to accomplish His purposes.

VERSES 11-12

1. And next came Elon as a Judge in Israel and he Judged Israel for ten years and he died. Now some say that these men did not have much of an impact on the people but I disagree. Think about the apostles of Christ, most of them we don't know much about after the death and resurrection of Jesus but I believe they served the Lord faithfully and as a servant, you don't need the recognition. The Lord included those apostles and the things they did so we can learn from them. But that does not mean the others did not impact those around them. It is easy for us to get in that kind of mindset, "Who am I?" But the reality is, you are a servant of Christ and whatever you do, do it faithfully and you will be rewarded accordingly!

VERSES 13-15

1. And here comes Abdon and he Judged Israel for eight years and he died and there is nothing more we know of him.

2. As I close tonight we have looked at 12 Judges in Israel: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon. Next time we will begin looking at the last Judge in the book of Judges, there are others, as we will see in our studies through the Bible. And this last Judge we will look at is Samson. A very interesting Judge, one who had great potential but came up far short of what he could have done for the Lord because he let the lust of the flesh control his life.

As I close let me leave you with these words to encourage you in the work that God has called you to do. Paul admonishes us in I Corinthians 15:58, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”** The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be firm (steadfast), immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord [always being superior, excelling, doing more than enough in the service of the Lord], knowing and being continually aware that your labor in the Lord is not futile [it is never wasted or to no purpose].”** Keep pressing on in the work that God has called you to do, for your efforts are not in vain!