

Judges 11 – Jephthah

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of a harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah.

Verse 1 – The son of Gilead and a harlot. Rough beginning and background, but called a mighty man of valor. Jephthah = he opens, he will deliver. Gilead = tribes of Gad and Manasseh

Notice, having a rough start doesn't disqualify you or prevent you from being mighty and accomplishing great things. This is good news.

² And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman. ³ Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

Verse 2 – His half-brothers kicked him out and told him he wasn't getting an inheritance from their father because his mom was a stranger. Gilead = rocky region, hill of testimony. Rocky relationship when things were not going good.

- Because of his past, and not his current capabilities, he is rejected. Be careful.

Verse 3 – Leaves and gets new friends to go out with him to battle. Tob = good. Vain = worthless men; broke folk. So may not be that they were evil people, just broke and not worth much. But he is now leading them.

Questions. If he is a mighty man of valor, I wonder what attracted these worthless people to him. I wonder why he would accept rolling with and hanging out with people like this?

Notice: He didn't follow them, they followed him. That is a huge difference. They must have seen hope in him, and he must have seen some worth in them that they and others didn't recognize.

My, my, Jephthah is looking similar to our Savior in this mission. One who is rejected by his brothers, can relate to others who have been rejected. He reaches out to them and becomes their leader. This sounds very much like the story of Jesus in our lives. Is our attitude one as seeing ourselves as worthless and humble before seeing him and are we following Christ, our mighty man of valor? Or is our attitude one of pride where we don't think He is worthy or needed in our lives.

- For each moment of our lives and decisions, which category do we fall into?
- Note, don't follow a crowd with no hope or purpose; they should be following us who have the hope of Christ.

⁴ And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel. ⁵ And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob: ⁶ And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon.

Verse 4 – As time went on Ammon made war with Israel.

Verse 5 – War must have been going bad for them because they were desperate enough to call him back from Tob.

Verse 6 – Want him to be their captain in the fight. Want to use him and his abilities for their own benefit.

Notice: It is only when they find themselves in need that they seek Jephthah. It is the elders who are wise enough to call on him to be their captain during this difficult time. Is this not similar today when often we don't call on the Captain of our faith until we find ourselves in a difficult battle and in need?

⁷ And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? And why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress? ⁸ And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayst go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

⁹ And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head? ¹⁰ And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words. ¹¹ Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.

Verse 7 – Good tactic, ask questions? Didn't you kick me out, so why are you coming now when you're in trouble? They never answer this question. That tells me they are not humble enough yet.

Question: If you were to go to God because you are in a difficult situation, and He were to ask you this same question above, what would your answer be?

- What is your opinion of the elders at this point in the story? On the right track but they have not arrived yet. Do you understand my statement?

Verse 8 – They never apologize for turning him out. No apology = not humble enough yet.

- “Therefore we turn again to thee now,” this seems to be the answer to his question by saying “therefore” perhaps to indicate the reason why they are coming to him is their distress.
- The point that they are turning “again” seems to indicate to me that they may have called upon him in the past.

Verse 9 – Good response....powerful and again wisely in the form of a question. Gives credit to God in advance. He still called that place home even though he got kicked out. He puts God in the mix of the conversation. He had to do it. Will I be the leader only when you need me, or will I still be your leader after you are delivered?

- Perhaps this is the same thing spiritually that we need to be aware of. In times of trouble, we need a mighty man of valor. Someone skilled at defeating the enemy like Jesus. But after we call on him to lead and we are delivered out of that situation, will he be invited to remain the head of our lives?
- Application: Is He the God of both our hills and valleys?

Verse 10 – Notice it was the elders who got involved. Where were they when they allowed him to get kicked out? They agree and swear unto God as a witness.

Verse 11 – He didn’t go with them until they committed a promise to God or got God involved in their actions as well. Mizpeh = watchtower (See Gen 31:49).

- The scripture indicates he may have traveled to Mizpeh alone. Regardless, Jephthah presents his words in prayer before the Lord before he confronts the problem.
- Application: Regardless of the immediate favor we may find, we should always go back and seek the Lord before we press forward. It is good to ensure we are in alignment with God.

¹² And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land? ¹³ And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably.

Verse 12 – Takes charge, true leader. Tries to avoid war by simply asking a question again. Why are you in my space causing trouble, what did I do to you? Tell me the reason why you want to attack me? Good question...write that down. In my land at that. Meaning, if he himself had come to Ammon’s land, place, bible study and clowned, they (Ammon) would have a good enough reason to fight against him, but now the enemy is in his place causing this trouble.

- Jephthah had fighting ability but used it as a last resort. Take notes. You don’t always want to let people have it as your first option just because you are good at it. Try peaceful means first.

- So why are you fighting against me again?
- Application: I can't over emphasize that Spirit filled questions continue to be a very Biblical and Godly approach to addressing conflict....in fact, it is often the first response and Jesus in the Gospels uses this often. If our Lord uses this, why would we not employ this method and wisdom?

Verse 13 – Ammon's answer....because Israel took away their land when they came out of Egypt now they want these lands back. Peaceably, meaning give them back without a fight. Enemy would rather do this without you fighting back, wants you to give up. They only want peace on their own terms.

- Dug up some old stuff as the reason for the right now conflict. Talk to me.
- Application: digging up old stuff for your right now conflict resolution may not be the best option. Somethings we may need to let go.

¹⁴ And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon: ¹⁵ And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon: ¹⁶ But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh; ¹⁷ Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh. ¹⁸ Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab.

¹⁹ And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place. ²⁰ But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. ²¹ And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. ²² And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan.

Verse 14 – Jephthah, responds the way he did before with messengers. Don't have to meet in person.

Verse 15 – Counters the argument of the enemy. Addresses that specifically. Israel didn't do what Ammon claims. Israel didn't take it from them, Israel took it from the Amorites who had control of it at the time (see Num 21:21-26). Israel wasn't supposed to fight and then give them back what somebody else had taken from them. That's crazy. If I go to the pawn shop, I'm not trying to find you to give you back what you pawned...it's mine now.

Verse 16 – Presents and recalls facts of how they came up from Egypt and the Red Sea. They behaved nobly, didn't give anyone a reason to have cause against them even when they were denied passage. Again, review the history in Number Chapter 21.

Verse 17 – They asked for permission to pass through lands on their way to their own place but were denied. They didn't clown, just went around them even though they were tired. Just go around them. Just avoid them if they don't want to be nice and help you. Don't trip, don't worry, just go around them. They will get theirs (1 Peter 2:15).

Verse 18-19 – Again, they politely ask Sihon the Amorite King, if they could pass through their land. Not only did he deny them passage, he attacked Israel.

Verse 20 – Instead of blessing them, they attacked them. Israel didn't start this, they were trying to be nice. They not only denied them, went the extra measure and attacked them. They must have been scared of their potential if they attacked.

Verse 21 – Jephthah tells them that God gave them the victory when they were attacked and as a result, they took over possession of that land. I like how he continues to glory and give God the credit.

Verse 22 – Jephthah agrees with the conclusion that they indeed were occupying the lands the enemy said they were because that part was true, but the enemy got the "how" twisted or left that part out in their reply. Jephthah reminds them of how this all went down.

- Sometimes you have to remind folks of the facts when they start acting crazy.
- Make sure the history is correct. Even today, people have a much different perspective of historical facts which may differ from the actual truth. When you don't have the history correct, you may encounter a painful repeat of history.

²³ So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it? ²⁴ Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess.

²⁵ And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them, ²⁶ while Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? Why therefore did ye not recover them within that time?

²⁷ Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon. ²⁸ Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

Verse 23 – He puts God in the discussion again. Israel didn't do it, God did. Because God was the one who did it, he asks a question, should they Ammon now have it after God took it away from them? If Ammon now has a problem, they should take it up with God (see Deu 2:24).

Verse 24 – Jephthah starts to break it down using terms and an example they could relate to. He's meeting them on their level with the right questions.

- You would do the same thing as Israel if your gods had delivered you into this place.

Verse 25 – Reminds them that Balak of Moab (Num 22:2) lost more and had more rights than they but he never said anything about it. So Jephthah's point is if the King of Moab didn't think to try and reclaim these lands, what gives them the right to make such a claim.

Verse 26 – Jephthah asks them why they didn't take back their land when they had a chance. Why wait all this time that had passed to pursue this mess now? More questions. Why are they bringing all this noise now? Had all that time to recover but didn't do it then. Gotta dig up something from 300 years ago as a reason...crazy.

Verse 27 – Summary, I haven't done you wrong in keeping what we have a right to, instead you wronged me. Brings the Lord back into the conversation since He was the one who delivered it to them; He can judge correctly who is right.

Application for Today: What is it that God has blessed you with that the enemy wants to take back? Tell the enemy no, he can't have it. If God blessed you with it, the enemy can't have it. If God has given you peace in the midst of the storm, tell the enemy he can't have your peace. Hold onto the blessing even in the storm.

Verse 28 – you would think that in the face of these facts that they would have repented, but they didn't listen. Don't be surprised if even though you lay down the facts, they just won't listen.

Even if you follow all the steps and do everything right, some people still will not get it....but you are in right standing.

²⁹ Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.

³⁰ And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, ³¹ Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

Verse 29 – When the enemy wouldn't listen, that's when the Spirit came on Jephthah and he was able to pass over and move toward and against the enemy. Led by the Spirit. I say that because he visits Mizpeh before he visits the enemy.

- Notice how he advances towards the enemy camp. Uses the discretion of the Holy Spirit.
- If they reject your position, don't get upset, get the Holy Spirit!
- Application: Good point to spend time with the Holy Spirit before you get ready to engage your problem or challenge.

Verse 30 – Vows a vow to God. Why? Had some doubt. "If" is the key word. "If" God will deliver the enemy into his hands....

- Lesson – there may still be some distrust and doubt lingering around even with true believers.
- His rationale must have been that he needed to promise and do something extra or great in order to get God to work this out for him.
- Eccl 5:2-6.
- This is serious. Remember who you are dealing with.....God!

Verse 31 – then "if" God would do this for him, he would dedicate to God the first thing that comes out of his house to greet him.

Note: He still had enough valor and faith to receive a victory and make it into Hebrews 11 Faith Hall of Fame, even though this seems like an obvious issue. Haven't we all been in this position at some point?

Several of my favorite commentaries (Matthew Henry, David Guzik) state:

- Well-intentioned but foolish....attempt to manipulate God or put Him under obligation to ourselves.
- Even a Spirit-filled person can do foolish things.
- There is no need to bribe God.
- There may be reminders of distrust and doubting even in the hearts of true believers.
- Jephthah had reason to be confident of victory, especially when the Spirit was on him...and yet....
- Perhaps the snare of the vow was designed to correct his weakness of faith.

³² So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. ³³ And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

Verse 32 – His part was to take on the enemy, God's job was to give him the victory. God delivered.

Verse 33 – Great victory...there was no doubt. Enemy was taken care of. God's people victorious. Wherever he went, victory was there.

The enemy beaten soundly. That can happen when your objective in the battle is greed and self rather than for the glory of God and the Kingdom.

³⁴ And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. ³⁵ And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! Thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.

Verse 34 – Daughter comes out to meet him....only child. I used this scripture with my daughter once to make a point of how to honor your parents when they arrive home.

Verse 35 – He immediately goes into mourning. Troubled because he made a vow to God. What came out of his mouth, he realizes he can't go back. Be very careful what comes out of your mouth, it can cause you some trouble. When the words leave your mouth, you can't pull them back.

- He cannot go back, he must go forward.
- Has anyone here made a vow to the Lord?
- It was perhaps foolish to make the vow, but he didn't make an even greater mistake by backing out of the vow. I wish married couples could understand the lesson demonstrated here....God honors vows.

Prov 20:25, Deu 23:22

³⁶ And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon. ³⁷ And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. ³⁸ And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

³⁹ And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel, ⁴⁰ that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.



Verse 36 – her response is awesome. She saw how God had worked in her father’s life and avenged him of the wrong that was done to him. Doesn’t just do it for her father, but to honor God as well.

Application: no matter how old or young, when you are obedient and honor your folks....you do great honor to God and glorify Him.

Verse 37 – requests that she be able to hang out with her friends for two months to mourn her virginity.

Verse 38 – she goes.

Verse 39 - awesome obedience....she returns and fulfills her father’s vow to God. Stayed a virgin.

Verse 40 – became a tradition to mourn over his daughter.