

Judges Chapter 11 Commentary

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

The start of this chapter gives us the background of the life of Jephthah, who is to be the next Judge over Israel. We know he was called of God to this position from the testimony of scripture in: ***1Sa 12:11 "And the LORD sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe.***" His father was Gilead, and his mother was a harlot, so we do not know what her lineage is. Because of his mother's lifestyle, Jephthah's brethren send him away. This is an opportunity for them to increase their inheritance by driving Jephthah away.

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."

Looking at some maps I found online; Tob is a land area to the east, of the borders of the two and one-half tribes that settled on the wrong side of Jordan river, near the border between Manasseh and Gad. The land of Tob would be in the land area inhabited by the Ammonites.

We are told that Jephthah was captain over a band of vain men. Historians tell us that Jephthah was quite the warrior with his army of men.

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. 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 mayest 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."

Israel is faced with an invasion of the land of promise by the Ammonites. They have been without a Judge for eighteen years, according to ***Jg 10:18, "And that year they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead."*** The previous chapter ended with: ***Jg 10:18 "And the people and princes of Gilead said one to another, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."*** Having no known or proven warriors of their own, the Gileadites send to Jephthah asking him to be their leader in the war, who, they have heard, has the reputation of being a very good warrior and leader of men.

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?"

We are told that Jephthah tries to dissuade the Ammonites from invading the land. Why would Jephthah do this? Peaceful resolution is often the best. Notice, Jephthah ask the Ammonites: Why are you seeking war with Israel? You have already oppressed us these eighteen years and now you suddenly want to make war.

There is a good lesson for us here. What does God tell us in New Testament scripture? ***Ro 12:18 "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.***" God knows; there will be times when others will oppose us, whether we know the cause or not. We have the example to inquire of the opposition what the problem is, which could lead to peaceful resolution. However, as we see in this chapter, when peaceful resolution is not possible, prepare to defend yourself, in accordance with the leading of God.

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."

The king of Ammon answers: Israel took my land away, speaking about the land possessed by Israel on the east side of Jordan which is occupied by the two and one-half tribes of Israel, and I want it back. If you give it back to me then we will not be at war.

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. 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 anything 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."

Jephthah's brethren may have driven him away from their family, but they certainly did not remove Israel's history from Jephthah's knowledge. Jephthah gives the king of Ammon a lesson in history of the journey of Israel. Jephthah also points out; Israel is in possession of what God has given them. He admonishes the Ammonites to be content with what their god, Chemosh, has given them.

28 "Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him. 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."

The king of Ammon rejects the reasonable pleading of Jephthah, and God filled Jephthah with his Spirit to deliver Israel from the Ammonites.

Jephthah makes a voluntary vow to God. This was a foolish thing for Jephthah to do since God has not required it of him. God has already filled Jephthah with the Holy Spirit power, which is all he needs to do what God has called him to do. Another good lesson for us; just follow the leading of the Lord, not adding to or taking from it.

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."

God gives Jephthah the victory and Israel is set free again.

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. 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."

Now, we see the foolishness of Jephthah's voluntary vow to God, made in *Jg 11:31 "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."* By his vow, he is required to give his only child, his daughter, to God, and to offer her as a burnt offering, as seen in:

- *Nu 30:1-2; 1 "And Moses spake unto the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded. 2 If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth."*
- *Ec 5:4-5; 4 "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. 5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."*

Now, we are sure; Jephthah wishes he had not made the vow. His heart is broken knowing that he is losing his only child, all because he made a vow that was not required of him.

Did you notice that Jephthah blamed his daughter of troubling him, when he is the one who made the foolish vow? How often; do we try to shift the blame, for our foolish mistakes, to others?

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."

The daughter has already told Jephthah that he should do what he promised God he would do. She does request some time to bewail her virginity and her request is granted.

Many commentators try to dissect the vow and say that Jephthah did not sacrifice his daughter as a burnt offering. They say he dedicated her to the Lord, and she could never marry or bear children. They give many and varied reasons as to why he did not offer her as a burnt offering to God, none of which seem to have valid basis for they make the written word to be inaccurate, which we believe to be inerrant.

Jephthah made a voluntary vow to God. As best that I can discern, there is nothing, in the wording of the text of this chapter, that would allow him to not perform his vow. We find further in: **Le 27:28-29; 28**
"Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the LORD of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the LORD. 29 None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death." Wherefore, I believe that Jephthah actually did sacrifice his daughter as a burnt offering.

What lesson can we learn from Jephthah's mistake? We should carefully consider the end result of any thing we may voluntarily promise God, or anyone else. We should never make vows that would make others bear some responsibility, or be of some cost to others, in what we are vowing to do. We should never make vows that would result in sinning to perform.

The final lesson: Do not make a vow when none is required? Remember the scripture in: **Ec 5:5 "Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay."** If we do not make vows, then we will not make foolish vows, and cause ourselves and others much pain and grief. If we just stick with "**thus saith the Lord**," all will be well, and God will be pleased with our dedication and service to him. After all, God tells us in scripture:

- **Joh 14:15 ¶ "If ye love me, keep my commandments."** This is all that God requires, to do according to "**thus saith the Lord**."
- **1Jo 3:22 "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."** A reminder that we receive not because we ask amiss. If we are not keeping the commandments of God, we should not expect answered prayers.
- **1Jo 5:2 "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments."** We have evidence in our lives that we love God, when we love God's people, and we are keeping God's commandments.
- **1Jo 5:3 "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."** Finally, If God's commandments are grievous to us, we need to reevaluate our lives. If we are in the will of God, his commandments will be easy for us to understand and obey. If we are trying to put our own fleshly will ahead of God's will, his commandments will be grievous to us.

Praise, and glory, to our God, who has provided for us, and left us a written testimony of Christ Jesus, and the commandments we are to follow.