

A FAITHFUL SERVANT KEEPS A FOOLISH PROMISE

Judges 10:6-12:7

Walking with the Saints: Jephthah.

"If people learn from their mistakes, many are getting a fantastic education!"

Very human people that God used [—part IV]

*Hebrews 11:32-34 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, **Jephthah**, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.*

JEPHTHAH'S LIBERATION FROM AMMONITES 10:6-12:7

A man who makes a *foolish* (?) decision is used by God to deliver His people

ISRAEL'S CONDITION 10:6-9 *Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And because the Israelites forsook the LORD and no longer served him, 7 he became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, 8 who that year shattered and crushed them. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites. 9 The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim; and Israel was in great distress.*

Israel began to bring the gods of the nations in alongside of their God.

Only eventually would they abandon Him completely.

Matthew Henry: "Those that think to serve both God and Mammon, soon come entirely to forsake God and to serve Mammon only. **If God have not all the heart, He will soon have none of it!**" —that's what Israel had come to.

Because of their rebellion, God sent Philistine and Ammonite oppressors to afflict them.

They suffered for 18 years before they called out to God for deliverance.

ISRAEL'S CRY 10:10 *Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, "We have sinned against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals."*

They called out to God, acknowledging that *their sin* has brought their distress.

GOD'S REJECTION 10:11-14 *The LORD replied, "When the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, 12 the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you and you cried to me for help, did I not save you from their hands? 13 But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. 14 Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!"*

For first time, when they cry out to God for help, He refuses to hear them

He reminds them of how often He has delivered them

And yet, each time they return to their evil ways.

Even in His rejection, God is seeking to restore them to Himself.

He suggests that they call on their new gods for help, He wants to be sure they understand that these other gods can't save them.

ISRAEL'S REPENTANCE 10:15-16 *But the Israelites said to the LORD, "We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now." 16 Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the LORD. And he could bear Israel's misery no longer.*

This time their repentance is genuine. They realize that their pagan gods can't solve their problem.

Realizing that these gods cannot help, they cast themselves on God's mercy to deal with them as He wishes.

They get rid of the foreign gods and decide to follow Jehovah.

Therefore, He responds to them by sending a new deliverer, one who in many ways resembles His own relationship with them.

JEPHTHAH'S ELEVATION 10:17-11:11 *When the Ammonites were called to arms and camped in Gilead, the Israelites assembled and camped at Mizpah. 18 The leaders of the people of Gilead said to each other, "Whoever will launch the attack against the Ammonites will be the head of all those living in Gilead."*

1 Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. His father was Gilead; his mother was a prostitute. 2 Gilead's wife also bore him sons, and when they were grown up, they drove Jephthah away. "You are not going to get any inheritance in our family," they said, "because you are the son of another woman." 3 So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the land of Tob, where a group of adventurers gathered around him and followed him.

*4 Some time later, when the Ammonites made war on Israel, 5 the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. 6 "Come," they said, "be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites." 7 Jephthah said to them, "Didn't you hate me and drive me from my father's house? **Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?**"*

*8 The elders of Gilead said to him, "Nevertheless, **we are turning to you now**; come with us to fight the Ammonites, and **you will be our head** over all who live in Gilead." 9 Jephthah answered, "Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and **the LORD gives them to me—will I really be your head?**" 10 The elders of Gilead replied, "The LORD is our witness; we will certainly do as you say." 11 So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them. And he repeated all his words before the LORD in Mizpah.*

Jephthah was an unlikely candidate to be the hero. *God would never choose such a person as he!* Jephthah was a reject from a dysfunctional family!

He has **THREE STRIKES AGAINST HIM:**

1) He is the son of a prostitute and thus rejected by society

He's illegitimate son of a pagan harlot; his younger brothers, legitimate sons of their father's true wife, rejected him.

They considered themselves better than he.

2) He has been exiled by his family and countrymen

They threw him out!

3) He is the leader of a gang, a pack of renegades.

They are described literally as “worthless” people.

He was running around with “the wrong kind of people”

What hope is there such a person could ever be a leader among God's people?

Surely God couldn't be bothered with such a low-life troublemaker!

These are often the very people God calls.

HE transforms them into something useful. *Then HE gets the glory!*

But when people needed a leader, they called HIM because of his ability as a warrior.

His response is much like God's was: “Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble? You never wanted me to lead you before! **11:7 Jephthah said to them, “Didn't you hate me and drive me from my father's house? *Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?*”**

They're desperate. They need help. They acknowledge that HE's the one who can help them. They promise to follow him! **11:8 The elders of Gilead said to him, “Nevertheless, *we are turning to you now*; come with us to fight the Ammonites, and *you will be our head* over all who live in Gilead.”**

Jephthah accepts, if they promise to submit to his authority *after* battle!

11:9 Jephthah answered, “Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and *the LORD gives them to me—will I really be your head?*”

If they want *him* to deliver them, he is going to rule them!

There's a parallel between their response to Jephthah and to his God.

They rejected both of them.

They only turn to Jephthah when it's clear they're not going to win without him! —same situation they faced with God in chapter 10.

They finally acknowledged they couldn't win without Him!

JEPHTHAH'S DIALOGUE 11:12-28

Jephthah discussed the land rights issue with the king of Ammon.

THREE REASONS THE LAND IS RIGHTFULLY THEIRS:

1) **Jehovah had taken disputed territory away from *the Amorites* (NOT the Ammonites) and given it to His people.**

They left Ammonites alone, at God's command

2) **When *their* God gave *them* victory, they *always* considered it their right to keep land as a gift**

3) **They have possessed the land for 300 years, why have they waited until now to demand its return? It's a bit late now**

King of Ammon wouldn't listen.

He wasn't interested in a logical explanation. He wanted the land.

JEPHTHAH'S VOW 11:29-31 *Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: “If you give the Ammonites into my hands, 31 whatever comes out of the door of my house to*

meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

Jephthah made a vow to the Lord that he would sacrifice whatever came out of his house to meet him upon his return.

He rightly acknowledged that the battle belongs to the Lord, and that without His intervention, they would *never* defeat the Ammonites.

God's Spirit came on him — He was strengthened by God to win battle.

He passed through the land, gathering troops as he went.

God's people recognized God's hand and followed him into battle.

JEPHTHAH'S VICTORY 11:32-33 *Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and **the LORD gave them into his hands.** 33 He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon.*

Jephthah comes home excited, thrilled about victory God has given them, until . . . =>

JEPHTHAH'S VOW FULFILLED 11:34-40 *When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break."*

36 "My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites. 37 But grant me this one request," she said. "Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry." 38 "You may go," he said. And he let her go for two months. She and the girls went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. 39 After the two months, she returned to her father and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin. From this comes the Israelite custom 40 that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

He was horrified when his daughter, his only child, came out to meet him!

Nevertheless, he fulfilled the vow he made to God.

This passage presents **problems no one seems to have an answer for:**

Early Jewish scholars and early Church fathers, took the passage literally.

Later scholars see figurative alternative: results in remaining childless.

In modern history, G. Campbell Morgan and Merrill Unger believe vow demands human sacrifice; J Vernon McGee is just as sure it didn't.

Those who believe Jephthah offered his daughter as sacrifice usually attribute that act to his half-pagan background, typical of that historical period — last few chapters of Judges *are* pretty gross!

G Campbell Morgan struggles—as all who have wrestled with this problem do—"The story seems to leave no room for doubt that he intended to offer a human sacrifice, . . . If indeed he offered her as a sacrifice by death the question of the morality of his act can be discussed only in the light of his time, . . . Certainly such an act was not justified by the law of Moses."

Maybe he expected family pet to come first—“whatever it is, I’ll give to God”

Maybe he remembered how God provided a ram for Abraham on mountain

Maybe he expected a *slaves* to come out and be sacrificed for the cause!

What IS clear is that he didn’t expect his only child, his daughter, to come out!] **11:34-35 When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet**

him but his daughter, . . . 35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, “Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break.”

She trusts him and she trusts His God completely **11:36** “My father,” she replied, “you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites.

Some think result of sacrifice says she remained a virgin. 11:37b, 39b
If this is taken literally, how do we deal with offering of human sacrifices?

I don’t know. But passage *seems* to indicate he fulfilled his vow and offered her as a burnt offering!

It’s not really all that different from what Abraham did with Isaac!

Jephthah *and* his daughter trusted God and were willing to obey Him.

In spite of problems, there are **POSITIVE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED:**

1. Like many people God used, Jephthah had no *earthly* reason to believe God would use Him

His background was dysfunctional – *he’d never amount to anything!*

He could have given up hope from the beginning

He could have reacted angrily and walked away

But he didn’t let all the negatives get to him!

2. Like other very human people, God’s strength was made perfect in weakness! It wasn’t the strong natural leader God used.

He used the one no one expected would ever amount to anything.

There’s hope for us! God can use ME too!

3. Jephthah acknowledges that GOD gave him the victory.

4. Jephthah is willing to give God His best; he withholds nothing, not even his only daughter (by implication, his grandchildren)

5.. Once vow is made, Jephthah is committed to fulfilling his vow

Scripture consistently warns us not to make promises to God that we don’t intend to keep.

Eccle. 5:2, 4-5: “Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God . . . When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it.”

When God calls your name, don’t offer to give Him everything, unless you intend to go through with it. God holds you to your promise!

Jephthah *may* not have been wise in making vow, but he kept vow!

=> **"O Jesus, I Have Promised" is NOT a foolish promise!**

It's a wise commitment to commit our lives to serve Him!

J Vernon McGee: "Christians today are notorious at making vows and then breaking them. . . . As a young Christian, I went to a young people's conference and watched 18 young people go forward and dedicate themselves to the Lord for full-time Christian service. I wouldn't go forward because I did not know whether I could make good my promise. May I say that out of all those who dedicated themselves to the Lord's service that night, not one of them entered full-time service! Have you made a vow to God? If you have, He wants you to keep it!