

Judges 11:12 – 12:7

Introduction – Jephthah, a great man of faith (Heb 11:32), serves the Lord in full devotion and sacrifice, and is used to bring a great deliverance for God’s people. Do not forget that in these cycles of judges we are to see the gospel of our great Judge, Jesus Christ.

Jephthah’s Message of Peace (vv12-28) – In sending messengers to Ammon, Jephthah is revealed to be a man of peace (v12). He is sending God’s Word to them, a gospel of sorts. He is not a rash man, nor ignorant of God’s dealings with His people and His enemies. The Ammonites claim that Israel had taken their land and they want it back (v13). Jephthah responds with a series of diplomatic arguments.

First Argument (vv14-18) – As Israel passed through the eastern side of the Jordan, she always attempted to remain at peace with the nations of Edom, Moab, and Ammon, respecting their borders.

Second Argument (vv19-22) – The disputed land that Israel took was the territory of the Amorites under king Sihon, not the Ammonites.

Third Argument (v23) – The Lord gave this land to Israel.

Fourth Argument (v24) – Jephthah charges them to live with what their god, Chemosh, had given them. One God was obviously greater than another, and Jephthah makes that case clear.

Fifth Argument (v25) – Jephthah also attempts to avoid war with threats. Balak couldn’t contend with Israel. What makes Ammon think they will?

Sixth Argument (v26) – Israel has occupied the land for 300 years.

Seventh Argument (v27) – Jephthah’s true faith is seen here. His final appeal is to the Lord, who is the real Judge of Israel.

Diplomacy Rejected (v28) – Ammon rejects the proposal for peace, thus bringing judgment upon themselves. Rejecting Jephthah’s words was, in effect, rejecting the Word of God.

Jephthah’s Vow and Conquest (vv29-33) – Jephthah is given a great victory over Ammon, but we are given very little information on the battle. Rather, the focus of the story is upon the vow that Jephthah makes and the results of that vow.

The Context – Jephthah has proven himself to be man full of knowledge of the scripture and the history of God’s people. He has declared his faith in Jehovah. Now, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him.

Whatever Comes Out of My House – The Hebrew implies a person, and Jephthah certainly has a human being, not an animal, in mind, for this dedicated one will come ‘*out of my house to meet me.*’ This would be similar to a tithe-offering. The firstfruits of the established peace are dedicated to God. Jacob made a similar vow in Gen 28:20ff.

Keep in Mind – Human sacrifice is demanded in the Bible, but human beings are defiled and therefore unacceptable sacrifices. God claimed the firstborn as his own (Ex 13:2, Num 8:17), but the Levites were substituted for all of the firstborn (Num 8:18). Notice, however that that these sacrificed Levites were not killed, but served the Lord in the tabernacle.

Jephthah’s Dynasty (vv34-40) – This is one of the most debated passages in the Old Testament. Did Jephthah actually take his daughter to the tabernacle, where the Levites would kill, skin, and section her, offering his daughter up as a ‘burnt offering?’ Some would argue that this is the only interpretation scripture allows.

Burnt Offering – “Olah” in the Hebrew is not emphasizing the burning of an offering; other offerings were burnt. The emphasis is on the ascension of the entire offering to God – no portion (other than the skin) was given to the priests.

Man-Offerings – Leviticus 27:1-7 describes the redemption contract for those consecrated by a vow to the Lord. But there are exceptions. Those irrevocably devoted could not be redeemed (v28). In a holy war ban, they would be killed (v29), but these were not sacrifices.

What Happened? – Jephthah, in a vow of dedication to the Lord for victory, promises to devote the firstfruits of peace coming from his home to the Lord – he will give him or her entirely away to the Lord. Jephthah is shocked when God providentially appoints his only daughter to be the one – most likely because Jephthah thought God was in the process of establishing Jephthah’s dynasty as king (head) over Gilead. He and his daughter, in faith, submit to God’s will and ‘sacrifice’ all such hopes. His daughter bewails her virginity with friends who would have been in her wedding party, and then goes and serves at the tabernacle (as other women did – see Ex 38:8 and 1 Sam 2:22). The daughters of Israel then went annually to the tabernacle to ‘recount’ (see the only other use of this word in Judges 5:11) the great sacrifice made by this judge and his only daughter.

Chastisement Within: The Rebellion of Ephraim (12:1-7) – This is the second time in the book of Judges that Ephraim shows up complaining that they are not getting the glory (8:1-3 with Gideon was the first). This time they threaten God’s appointed judge,

something the law condemns (Deut 17:12). Ephraim makes a false claim (they weren't summoned to battle) and then insult's the Lord's anointed and his men (v4).

God's Humorous Irony (vv 5-6) - Jephthah's men captured the fords of the Jordan where the Ephraimites had to cross to return to their home (they had made an offensive attack on Gilead). This was the same tactic Ephraim had used against Midian (6:3). 42,000 Ephraimites fell under God's judgment.

Attacks From Within - After great battles against the real enemy, the righteous often have to face complaining and attack from within the Church. There will always be something to criticize. Look to those who, like Ephraim, are actually more concerned with their own glory than the Lord's and His Church, to bring charges against the ones who return from battle.

Incomplete Reign (v7) - Perhaps the six years of judging represents the shortcoming of man's rule to bring a full and lasting Sabbath-rest.

Following the Gospel Shadows - In our first sermon on Jephthah, we saw the shadows of a deliverer 'despised and rejected', and one who would be both savior and lord. We saw this gift of God's kindness despite His people's rejection of Him. The parallels continue.

God's Kindness and Patience Towards His Enemies - In Acts 17, Paul preaches God's patience and kindness to the world, bearing with their ignorance and idolatry. But now He commands everyone to repent, for a day is coming when His Judge will judge the world with true justice.

Total Submission, Total Devotion - As the Son was submissive to the Father, so Jephthah's daughter fulfilled her father's vow. This sacrificed Jephthah's only opportunity to establish the dynasty he thought should exist. We also, must follow our Lord's example and offer up ourselves as living sacrifices to God (Rom 12:1-2), burnt sacrifices in complete devotion to the Lord, nothing withheld.

After Victory, Rejection from Within - When Christ rose from the dead, He was still rejected by many in the house of Israel, and a great and final judgment was brought upon them. In the church, we still must beware of those who in fact are disloyal to the great Judge and Deliverer.

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