

The Battles of Jephthah

1. How do you respond during times of doubting God?

Stop and Pray - Help me to understand all that Jephthah did, good and bad, from Your perspective, Lord. Reveal to me why You considered him one of the heroes of the faith.

After being made head of his father's people and laying the whole matter out before the Lord at Mizpah, Jephthah sent out messengers in an attempt to diplomatically address the dispute between Ammon and Gilead.

Read Judges 11:12-28 – Jephthah's Diplomacy and Victory. Mark this text on pages 6 and 7.

2. Briefly summarize what was discussed and concluded in Judges 11:12-28.

3. What can we learn about Jephthah's relationship with God from his negotiations with the Ammonites?

4. What principles for life can we glean from Jephthah's approach and reasoning in the conflict with the Ammonites?

Read Judges 11:29-40 – Jephthah's Vow. Mark this text on page 7.

5. When left with no other option but to wage war, what happened to Jephthah to encourage him that war was the appropriate next step?

6. Although Jephthah had reason to be confident of success:
 - a. What specifically did he do just prior to entering into battle?

 - b. Was this a wise move to make? Why or why not? (See Numbers 30:1-2; Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Ecclesiastes 5:4-6.)

 - c. What do you think might have been going on in Jephthah's heart and mind that would have led him to do this?

 - d. Can you relate to Jephthah's inner turmoil in the face of the challenge that stood before him? If so, how?

7. Had Jephthah had a more complete knowledge of God's word, what provision would he have known about that had been placed into God's law (Leviticus 27:1-8)?

8. From Judges 11:34-40, what do we know for certain happened upon Jephthah returning home in victory?

Jephthah kept his vow! We don't know exactly how. If he sacrificed his daughter, it tells us something about the depravity of his times. If she devoted the rest of her life in temple service, he would have had no heirs. Either consequence was horrible. Had God needed us to know the exact outcome of Jephthah's vow, He would have made it very clear. Perhaps the vow is not what He wants us to focus on.

9. When we doubt our abilities to be used by God we can be assured that:
(Personalize the following verses.)
2 Corinthians 5:17

Ephesians 2:10

Philippians 4:13

10. Pertaining to vows, I need to remember:
Matthew 5:33-37

James 5:12

11. a. What truths about God should the victory over Ammon have returned to Israel's mind?
- b. However, what would Israel always remember about Jephthah's victory?
12. At the end of chapter 11, what would you expect Jephthah's emotional state to have been?

Read Judges 12:1-7 – The Battle with Ephraim. Mark this text on pages 7 and 8.

13. How would you describe Ephraim in this passage and in Judges 8:1-3 that also describes some members of God's church today?
14. Take note of these three things: the reason for the battle, the steps Jephthah took, and the outcome of the battle. How did Jephthah handle the Ephraimites in Judges 12:2-6 that parallels what we sometimes do in our churches today?

15. a. How does God want us to handle disagreements in the church (Romans 12:17-21; Ephesians 4:2-3; Philippians 2:14-16; Colossians 3:12-16)?
- | | | |
|------------|----------------|-------------|
| <u>Do:</u> | <u>Do not:</u> | <u>Why?</u> |
|------------|----------------|-------------|

- b. What will you remember from Christ's example when you are criticized?

As stated in Ephesians 4:2-3, unity is not something we create. Christ created our unity in His church when He bound us to Himself at the cross. However, we can choose to either destroy that unity or preserve it by figuratively laying down our swords. In this passage, Israel was fighting Israel and diminishing its witness to their world over personal differences that had nothing to do with God's truth. How often we do the same thing!

16. a. In what ways have you picked up your sword to destroy the unity that Christ has already created in His church? (Church – universal body of believers who are saved by their relation to Christ, including but not limited to your local church body.)
- In the past -

Currently -

- b. How will you make right the wounds you have already inflicted or received? For example, do you need to ask for forgiveness or attempt to make amends for the damage caused by your slander?
- c. How will you remember to lay down your sword in the future?

17. After reviewing Jephthah's whole story, why do you think Jephthah was listed among the people of faith in Hebrews, chapter 11?

Final Thoughts: No matter our personal history, we need to remember that the past is the past. We are new creations in Christ. God can work through us because He has already worked a miracle in us.

However, Jephthah's story shows us that a saved life is not a guarantee of an easy life. Not only can we carelessly bring grief into our own lives in a moment of weak faith, but in addition, we are linked with God in a cosmic conflict with demons and godless men. Sometimes suffering comes not because we are in the wrong, but because we are on God's side.

When suffering for Christ follows our victories and puts us in a state of distress, may we be especially intentional in laying down our swords to preserve the unity among fellow believers. May we allow God, our covenant partner, to defend us. His way of defending will produce eternal fruit. We, on the other hand, will typically over-punish in our desire to seek justice (or in blind anger, revenge), thus interfering with God's work in progress and diminishing the church's witness to the world.

Pray - Thank You for the work You have done in me. Help me to believe I am completely new. Help me to submit to Your command to preserve the unity of the church so that Your witness to my world will increase.

Kyna Ritchie (original 2002; revised 2013)

Lesson 17 — Jephthah: Part II — Judges 11:30-12:7

Examine your text.

Mark your text. Put a box around time words (e.g. when, then, at the end of). Put a circle around conditional words (e.g. but, thus, so that, because). Put a jagged brown line under references to locations. Underline all references, including pronouns:

- Jephthah in green
- Israel in blue (including tribes)
- God in red
- an enemy in black
- Jephthah's daughter in purple

Judges 11:12-28 — Jephthah's Diplomacy and Victory

12 Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, "What is between you and me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?" 13 The king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up from Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan; therefore, return them peaceably now." 14 But Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the sons of Ammon, 15 and they said to him, "Thus says Jephthah, 'Israel did not take away the land of Moab nor the land of the sons of Ammon. 16 'For when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh, 17 then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let us pass through your land," but the king of Edom would not listen. And they also sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. 18 'Then they went through the wilderness and around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and came to the east side of the land of Moab, and they camped beyond the Arnon; but they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab. 19 'And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, "Please let us pass through your land to our place." 20 'But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory; so Sihon gathered all his people and camped in Jahaz and fought with Israel. 21 'The LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them; so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. 22 'So they possessed all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and from the wilderness as far as the Jordan. 23 'Since now the LORD, the God of Israel, drove out the Amorites from before His people Israel, are you then to possess it? 24 'Do you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God has driven out before us, we will possess it. 25 'Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive with Israel, or did he ever fight against them? 26 'While Israel lived in

Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time? 27 'I therefore have not sinned against you, but you are doing me wrong by making war against me; may the LORD, the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon.'" 28 But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him.

Judges 11:29-40 — Jephthah's Vow

29 Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon. 30 Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, 31 then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." 32 So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. 33 He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel. 34 When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had no son or daughter. 35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take it back." 36 So she said to him, "My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said, since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon." 37 She said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions." 38 Then he said, "Go." So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. 39 At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, 40 that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

Judges 12:1-7 — The Battle with Ephraim

1 Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon without calling us to go with you?"

We will burn your house down on you." 2 Jephthah said to them, "I and my people were at great strife with the sons of Ammon; when I called you, you did not deliver me from their hand. 3 "When I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the sons of Ammon, and the LORD gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?" 4 Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You are fugitives of Ephraim, O Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and in the midst of Manasseh." 5 The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan opposite Ephraim. And it happened when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," 6 then they would say to him, "Say now, 'Shibboleth.'" But he said, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it correctly. Then they seized him and slew him at the fords of the Jordan. Thus there fell at that time 42,000 of Ephraim. 7 Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead. (Judges 11:12-12:7, NASB95)