

Jephthah - Part 1

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[0 : 00] Well, let's take our Bibles tonight and open them to the book of Judges.

! Judges chapter 11 is where you need to open your Bibles to. Judges chapter 11.

! Judges chapter 11. Now, last time, if I could remind every one of us, we dealt with, really we're looking in chapter 10 and dealt with those passages that represent kind of a precursor to the rise of Jephthah to be judge in Israel. And so now tonight we'll get into chapter 11 and where Jephthah is really introduced to us, the man Jephthah, and what he accomplished. So we're going to try to move through most of this chapter with the exception of a certain part toward the end that is very interesting. We'll save that for next time and I'll explain that when we get there.

All right, the enemies, there are two of them in this case and this time they are the Philistines and the Ammonites, though we don't hear really much about the Philistines, anything about the Philistines here in chapter 11. It's the Ammonites that we're going to be dealing with and Jephthah dealt with. And they were the ones, of course, the Philistines and the Ammonites, they were the ones that God used to punish his rebellious people. And he did that every time, didn't he? He would raise up or allow enemies, pagans, to come in and oppress God's people so that they would then cry out to God and then God would be merciful and he would deliver them. And, of course, the sad epitaph is that they continued to rebel and we have that cycle that we talked about, have talked about a number of times. All right, so they will be the enemies, these enemies, the Philistines and the Ammonites will be the enemies for the next four judges, counting Jephthah. Jephthah first and then three minor judges. We talked about minor judges a few, several weeks ago. We have minor judges, Ibzan, Ibzan and Elolan and Abdon. All right, we'll get to those on down the road. And their stories are going to take us all the way to really through to chapter 12 and verse 15. We're not going to cover all of those tonight.

In fact, we're going to take a couple of more sessions tonight and next Sunday night, Lord willing, to deal with Jephthah. Jephthah. So tonight, Jephthah. Now, you know the fairy tale, I'm sure, of the ugly duckling.

[3 : 15] You know, and as it goes, once upon a time, according to this fairy tale, a duckling was hatched. You know the story. And he was very much unlike the other ducklings and which were around him. And it seems that he did not fit in with them. You know, this ugly duckling. He was awkward. His neck seemed to be a little bit longer than the others. So it was a nuisance to him. He kind of waddled along with the rest of the duck crowd. And it didn't take long for him to receive kind of the nickname, the ugly duckling. And pretty soon, his friends began to shun him, reject him. And so he grew very lonely. And yet, at the same time, he did grow. And one day, his ugliness was replaced, of course, with the grace and beauty of a swan. All right. So you know the story of the ugly duckling. Now, I'm going to kind of compare that story with, somehow, with Jephthah. With Jephthah. And I think as we kind of go along with what the Bible reveals about him and his beginnings and so forth, I think you can kind of see a comparison. Because the fairy tale then reminds us of this fascinating judge named Jephthah. Jephthah. And someone has said that a man is known by five things. And I guess I would add also women are known by these same five things, okay?

Five things in their lives. He is known, first of all, for his character. That is who he is. He is known for his conduct. That is, of course, what he does. He is known for his conversation. That is what he says. He is known for his creed. That's what he believes. And then he is also known for his contribution. Those are the things that he gives, gives of his life to this world. And those are the kind of men that we need. And women, too, because women are known for these things as well. Those are the kind of men we need and women we need in the church serving the Lord. All right, so now Jephthah was a man like that. Though you have to look really close sometimes to see this. He was

a man like that, though. Or I guess we should say God made him into a man just like that. And as we're going to see,

Jephthah certainly didn't get, you know, really a good start. His start wasn't all that great. In fact, he had a rather dubious beginning in life, as we're going to see in the passage. And as someone has put it, Jephthah went from the hall of shame to the hall of fame. And I mean, literally, you're going to find his name mentioned in the famous chapter in Hebrews, Hebrews chapter 11, where the Bible says, And what more shall I say? Okay, what more? I mean, we've already talked about these greats like Abraham and Moses and so forth. What more shall I say for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah? Jephthah. So even before we look at his story, we already know that he was a man of faith. All right, even if you can't necessarily see it real clearly in the story, we can come to the story with this already settled, with this premise that he was a man of faith. Even though Jephthah, as another has put it, went from zero to hero.

And he really did. Yeah, he had a terrible beginning. Or again, we could even put it this way, Jephthah was the rejected who became the ruler and great leader of Israel. All right, so we're going to consider then Jephthah tonight and consider chapter 12 under these three kind of three headings.

First of all, Jephthah's humble beginning. Jephthah had a humble beginning. And to use the word humble is to put it mildly. Because if you look there in verse 1, now Jephthah, the Gileadite, was a mighty man of valor. Now we're going to come back to this in a moment because that's not really speaking of his beginnings. That's really speaking more of what he became. So we'll get back to that in a minute. Because we have to start at the beginning. So verse 1, now Jephthah, the Gileadite, was a mighty man of valor. But there's that big, well, I don't say it that way, that big conjunction there. All right, I'll use that word. I mean, this is significant. Now we're ready to hear something, oh, something not so good. He was a mighty man of valor, but, but what? And this is a disturbing kind of qualification. But he was the son of a harlot. Jephthah was a son of a harlot. That, that describes his beginnings. Son of a harlot. And Gilead begot Jephthah. Begot Jephthah of a harlot.

[8 : 47] Not of his wife, but of a harlot. His father was named Gilead. Now, Jephthah was a Gileadite. Now, Gilead wasn't named after his father. His father was named after Gilead. All right, so it's probably a very common thing for someone to have, you know, be given the namesake of the father of their country, father of their people. And, and so he's a Gileadite. But this Gilead here was an immoral representative of his ancestor, clearly. And he apparently frequented the houses of prostitution. Or, at the very least, he had a fleeing with a prostitute, a harlot. That's how the Bible describes it. That's, that's what we're to understand. So, Jephthah, as, was Gilead's illegitimate son. That, that's his beginning. We're talking about a judge of Israel, ultimately, who would become a great leader and deliverer, judge of, of, of, of Israel. And we're going to learn some, I think, some pretty, pretty wonderful things about Jephthah. But he began as an illegitimate son. He was an illegitimate, illegitimate son of Gilead, the son of a prostitute, the son of his father's immorality and shame. Very humble beginning. Pretty tough way to begin your life. All right, now, Jephthah did have some brothers, of course. In verse 2, it says here that Gilead's wife bore sons. All right, so there were brothers. And I think we can assume sisters as well, but it's the brothers that we want to focus on here. He had some brothers who were born of Gilead, his father, but they were not illegitimate. They were true sons of Gilead through his wife, his wife. And so, but then as we read on here, it says, and when his wife's sons grew up, what happened? They drove Jephthah out and said to him, you shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman. That's pretty, pretty rough treatment, isn't it?

Now, it's not so unusual to see this if you could, so if we could somehow immerse ourselves into the culture here. But I think all of us would agree when we read that, we think, well, this, that's just really terrible. That they would despise him and reject him because he was illegitimate.

But that's exactly what they did. They kicked him out of the family. He had no inheritance. All right, so now he has no inheritance, no money, no resources at all. He's destitute. He's, he's, he's on his own, this son of Gilead. And now, you know, with all that said, someone might wonder, how could a guy like that then become a judge? I mean, think about that. I mean, his future, pretty grim. I mean, how could that ever happen? How could we ever think then that he was worthy to lead Israel with this kind of, kind of dubious beginning in his life? Clearly, an unlikely savior for the people of God. But I think we should understand that Jephthah was more sinned against than he was sinning here.

He didn't ask for that. He didn't do this to himself. He was despised and rejected by his own people. Now, don't forget, despised and rejected was also applied to the one chosen to be the savior of God's people, the Lord Jesus Christ, right? So don't ever forget that.

The fact that he was sinned against didn't make him an unworthy subject or unworthy person to one day become a great leader and deliverer of Israel. In fact, some of the other judges, the one we're going to be studying in a few weeks, Samson, had a much more dubious life. And it would be even more difficult for us to imagine that Samson would be worthy of being a judge of Israel than we could imagine Jephthah being in that place of leadership. But then we begin to see a glimpse of his worth, I think, when we get to verse 3. Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob, and worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out raiding with him. That's how it's translated in the New King James and something similar in the King James. And you're thinking, well, now, you mean we're supposed to now be beginning to see how Jephthah could be a leader? This doesn't sound very good either, does it? You know, at least in the face value, when we first read that, we think, well, you know, this is not good. He became the leader of a band of men.

[14:01] The Bible says that they're worthless men, at least in this translation. King James, I think, uses the word vain. Maybe all the other translations, as I recall, use the word worthless.

Worthless men. And that would be an English translation, but it simply means that they were unemployed. Destitute, in a sense. No attachment. They were bankrupt. No resources of their own. They're cast outs. You know, they, in fact, the literal meaning of the word means is just simply empty. Vain. That could mean empty pockets as well as just empty heads. That could mean empty anything. Or vain. And that's how the King James translates it. Just like Jephthah. So these men were kind of in the same boat that Jephthah was in. We don't know their stories. It doesn't really matter if they had a similar kind of thing and ostracizing from their families or being kicked out of the family for this, that, or the other. We don't know. It doesn't really matter. But they're very similar to Jephthah. And the Bible says they banded together with Jephthah. They kind of rallied around him. They were attracted to him. And they went out raiding. That's what the New King James reads. But the word's really not in the original text. And most of the other versions kind of leave that out. They just went out with him. They went out with him. That's the idea. Now, the idea here is not criminal. They weren't criminals. That's the first thing we want to think about. And that is kind of what that word raiding tends us to gravitate toward. We picture in our minds these raiders are going out pillaging and taking advantage of weak people and robbing and so forth, you know.

But that's not what this is about. And we know that's not what this is about because of what is going to happen a little bit later in the story. The idea here is a kind of a band of misfits.

You know, certainly they're just kind of misfits according to society. And they were all at some point outcasts. And maybe they were a little rough around the edges, seedy kind of people, you know. And they were not the kind of people that you want to date your daughter. You know, maybe that's the idea. I don't know, you know, what their background was. But they're just outcast kind of people. And they saw something great in Jephthah. They were the ones to see something worthy there.

[16:33] Something his family could not see because of, you know, kind of their legalism and some of their judgmentalism and so forth. And their kind of rigid law keeping. They couldn't see anything good in Jephthah because no fault of his own. But he was illegitimate. And so he's just not worth anything.

We need to cast him out. But these people who were somewhat the same kind of culture, same kind of situation of Jephthah, they saw something in him. And they gravitated to him. And they were, and here's the idea, they were, became a private army. Kind of a private army that actually protected Israel. You know, you could call them soldiers of fortune. Well, I think that really is conveyed in the idea. But they were certainly soldiers. They were men of valor. They were a private army led by Jephthah. And they protected Israel in their own way. And they protected Israel or Gileadites specifically because that's the area that we're concerned about here. And protected them from the attacks of their enemies. So Jephthah was their valiant, brave leader. Mighty man of valor. Valiant soldier. And he then, I think we'd understand, molded these misfits into an effective fighting force for Israel. And we'll see that this is the idea as we go along in the story.

So Jephthah's humble beginning. Second, we have Jephthah's heart belief or beliefs. And there are several identifiers of what Jephthah believed and stood for in the verses that follow here. And we can look starting with verse 4. And I think we see here that he was a man of forgiveness.

A man of forgiveness. A man of mercy. So let me just read starting with verse 4 there. It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Israel. Now this is kind of repeat of something that was already said in chapter 10. So they're, you know, they're making war against Israel. And so it was when the people of Ammon made war against Israel that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. Then they said to Jephthah, come and be our commander that we that we may fight against the people of Ammon. So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, did you not hate me and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?

[19 : 32] And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, that is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, if you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon and the Lord delivers them to me, shall I be your head, your leader, your judge? And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, the Lord will be a witness between us if we do not do according to your words. Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead and the people made him head and commander over them.

And Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord in Mizpah. Now that's kind of a long passage there, but here is where we understand several things about the character, really the heart belief of Jephthah. First of all, he was a man of forgiveness. And I think we have in this story forgiveness, forgiveness in action. And notice, by the way, who has come to ask Jephthah for help?

His brothers. That's what it's meant here by not the elders of Gilead, but the elders of Gilead, his father Gilead, his brothers, they came to him, the very ones who had cast him out. And they've come to Jephthah seeking help. And it's interesting, by the way, and I'll just kind of throw this out to you. We studied chapter 10 last Sunday night, right? And the kind of back and forth between the people of Israel and God, and then the people of Israel and back to God again. And you know, that kind of dialogue that took place there. It's interesting, we almost have an exact parallel between those passages in chapter 10, Israel dealing with God and God with them, and this passage here in chapter 11 between the people of Gilead and Jephthah. It's interesting what a parallel is there. Let me just point it out to you. In chapter 10, verses 7 through 9, we have the Ammonite oppression of Israel. And then here in chapter 11, verse 4, what do we have? The Ammonite oppression of Israel. So that gets it started, this parallel gets started. Same thing's happening there, it's happening here. Then in chapter 10, verse 10, we have Israel appealing to God for help.

[22 : 07] Help us because of this oppression. And then what do we have in chapter 11, verse 5? We have Israel, or really Gilead specifically, appealing to Jephthah for help. You see the parallel. And then in chapter 10, verse 11, you have Yahweh's kind of sarcastic response to Israel. Remember, did I not deliver you from your enemies? Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods. Then we have almost an identical parallel. In chapter 11, verse 7, you have Jephthah's sarcastic response to his elders. He said, did you not hate me? I mean, and expel me from my father's house. Why have you come to me now when you are in distress? Almost the same kind of reaction. You just go help yourself.

You did this to me. Why should I help you? All right. And then in chapter 10, verse 15, we have Israel repeating their appeal to God for help. And then in chapter 11, verse 8, we have Gilead, or the elders of Gilead, repeating their appeal to Jephthah. Almost a line for line parallel. And then finally, in chapter 10, verse 16, we have God forgiving and sending deliverance. And the Bible says there, he just couldn't take this, take their suffering anymore. It's, you have to read between the lines. It's God's mercy for them and forgiveness to them. And then in chapter 11, verses 9 through 11, we have Jephthah forgiving and agreeing to come and to fight for Israel. And in effect, at the close of chapter, verse 11, he's taking his vow, his oath to be their leader. He has forgiven them. I mean, look at what they did to him. And at first, he very sarcastically rebuffs them, just like God very sarcastically rebuffed Israel when they cried out to him. And then they appeal again. And then Jephthah says, okay,

I will come and help. And God, in effect, said, okay, I will send you deliverance. That's interesting that too, and it just highlights kind of the forgiveness, the character of God in the heart of Jephthah, his forgiveness. All right, so we're talking about Jephthah's heart belief. He was a man of forgiveness, but he was also a man of faith. He was a man of faith. And we see that at the end of

verse 11, I read it a moment ago. Let me read it again. Jephthah spoke his words before the Lord in Mizpah. Now, you say, how is that a statement about his faith? Well, Mizpah was the place of the sanctuary before the Lord in Mizpah. Jephthah was a true man of faith, true man of faith in Yahweh God, because he knew that his leadership, his leading of the armies of Israel must be under God. They couldn't just take that for himself. This had to be something that would be spoken before God. It had to be sanctioned by God. And so he spoke his oath. This is what this is talking about, an official oath of duty. And he spoke it before whom? The Lord. The Lord. Now, the people, the armies of Israel were also there and witnessed this at Mizpah. We know that from chapter 10, verse 17. The Bible says there that the children of Israel had assembled together and had encamped together in Mizpah. So they're there. But the idea, the focus is Jephthah before the Lord. And he is speaking his words before him, thereby signifying his absolute faith in the Lord. And even if that's a little sketchy for you, then you can default back to Hebrews 11, 32, whatever verse it is, and where clearly Jephthah is included with all of the great men and women of faith down through the ages of the Old Testament. Jephthah was a man of faith. He was a man of forgiveness, a man of faith. And then finally, here under this section, he is a man of focus. Man of focus. Now, there's a lot to read here about that, but in verses 12 through 28, we don't have yet the battle. See, you would expect now, Jephthah has taken his oath of office, his oath of duty, his vow of duty. And so then, you know, he would get the armies together and they would go out and meet the Ammonites on the battlefield and win the victory. But that doesn't come first. It's interesting because before they have the battle, there is some negotiation or some dialogue, quite a lot of it actually, between Jephthah and the king of Ammon, the Ammonites. Now, it's not a face-to-face dialogue. He writes these things and there are messages, back and forth exchanges of messages. But these verses, and you know, just really don't need to take a lot of time with this. I'll just kind of read through them and kind of try to begin to pick up on Jephthah's argumentation, his thought processes here as he is kind of carrying on a dialogue with the king. He's trying to stop this thing before it comes to a battle, which is rather interesting, isn't it? And he was a master at this. And let me just begin. Now, Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon saying, what do you have against me that you have come to fight against me and my land? Now, you know, me, he's not just fighting against Jephthah. This is all-inclusive.

[28 : 23] Why are you coming against us? It's a pretty logical question to begin with. I mean, this is pretty smart. All right, what's going on here? What's your problem with us? All right, let's go on.

And the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Jephthah, because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, that's a river, and to the Jordan.

Now, therefore, restore these lands peaceably. So this is the king of Ammon's reason for coming against them. You're on our land. We want you out of there. That's why we're here. All right, so then, verse 14, so Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon. All right, now here's his response. And by the way, he kind of responds with a little history lesson for the king of Ammon.

And said to him, thus says Jephthah, Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon. For when Israel came up from Egypt, they walked through the wilderness as far as the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, please let me pass through your land. So we didn't take...first we came through here, but we asked permission to come through. And...but the king of Edom would not heed. And in like manner they sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained in Kadesh. All right, we honored that for a time. And they went along through the wilderness and bypassed the land of Edom and the land of Moab, came to the east side of the land of Moab, and encamped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the border of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab. All right, then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Hishbon. And Israel said to him, please let us pass through your land into your place. But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together, encamped in Jabez, and fought against Israel. And the Lord God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the land, hand of Israel, and they defeated them. Thus Israel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites who inhabited the country. They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan.

And now the Lord God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel. Should you then possess it? All right, now what does he say? See, I don't have any idea. What's he saying?

[31 : 27] Well, basically he's saying this wasn't your land to begin with. Now, you know, we respected the lands pertaining to you by asking permission. When we got to this place, it was the Amorites who possessed this land that was not the Ammonites. Are you confused? There's a difference between Ammonites and Amorites.

And Jephthah is just basically telling the king of Ammon, if this is the reason why you've come against us and want to conquer us, then let me give you a history lesson. This land didn't belong to your people in the first place. All right, so you think, well, that ought to be enough. And so the king all say, well, I guess you're right about that. All right, let's just forget it. We'll go home.

Well, of course, a little bit later we find out he doesn't do that. All right. However, verse 28. Oh, wait a minute. I skipped on down here. Where was I? Yeah, 23. And now the Lord God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorite. I read that already. Verse 24. Will you not possess whatever chemash, chemash, your God gives you to possess? So whatever the Lord our God takes possession of before us, we will possess? And now you, are you any better? Now, let me stop there just a minute. Here's kind of a second argument. First one was historical. Now, this one is theological. What did he say there? He said, you possess whatever chemash, chemash, really it's chemash.

That's their God. You possess what your God gives you to possess. That is, the land that's yours right now? Your God gave that to you, all right? Now, it's kind of tongue-in-cheek, all right? He doesn't believe in the God chemash. But he's just appealing to what was the standard kind of belief in the day that the lands that you possessed, they were yours because your God gave them to you. And so the land you're living on right now, that was given to you by your God, chemash. This land was given to us by our God, all right? So don't be coming over here and trying to take our land. Our God gave us this land. Your God gave you that land. So he's kind of dealing with him on a, you know, kind of a tongue-in-cheek kind of theological basis here.

[33 : 51] And then he's going to kind of argue on the basis of some precedent. It's just really, Jephthah is just a master here in his appeal to the king.

And so if you look there in verse 25, And now are you any better than Balak, the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he ever fight against them?

While Israel dwelled in Heshbon and its villages in Ararah and its villages and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon for 300 years, why did you not recover them within that time?

So it really is kind of throwing up two things here. He's referring them to a guy who lived 300 or more years ago, one of their ancestors.

He didn't attack them. So why should you? Are you better than this revered leader within your history, Balak? He didn't.

[34 : 55] Why should you? That seemed like a reasonable request. And then he argues on the basis, kind of a, really kind of an argument from silence. And that is, listen, we've been here 300 years.

Why are you now contesting our right to be here? 300 years! I told you, just listen to me. At the very beginning, we could have saved your people a whole lot of bloodshed.

But, of course, the king of the people of Ammon is going through with it. He's not going to be thwarted.

Any amount of logic and persuasive speech and any amount of very plausible suggestions to him are not going to make any difference.

And so he's going to attack. So, see, we have then a man of focus. I mean, he's just so focused. And you can just sense that in these letters that he wrote to the king.

[36 : 04] I mean, here's Jephthah. He's a valiant warrior. But he's not stupid. You know, he's not just one of those career soldiers and all he's looking for is another war, another battle.

He's very wise, very shrewd. And he's going to lay all this out for the king. And he's very focused on getting God's people out of danger because that's what he's been called to do.

And first he tries to do that through reasoning. And that didn't work. And so then we see the final thing about Jephthah, and that is his heroic battle.

His heroic battle. Now, even though Jephthah's speech before the king of Ammon, again, was masterful, the king was stubborn. And so then what happened?

Jephthah led his armies and won a great victory. And as always, you know, the source of his heroic victory in battle was God himself.

[37 : 09] So look there at verse 29. Then the Spirit of the Lord. Now that's the most important thing said in that entire verse. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah.

And he passed through Gilead and Manasseh and passed through Mishpah of Gilead and from Mishpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon.

Now what's Jephthah doing here? He's building an army. He's mustering up the people of the surrounding territories.

Now it doesn't say that he blew his horn like Gideon did. You know, sounding the alert and calling for, marshalling the armies of Israel.

He may have done something similar to that. But he's gathering all these people together. I mean, Jephthah's a very purposeful man. You know, he's not shy.

[38 : 18] Not a coward. He's very courageous. And he's very determined. Very deliberate. Very focused. And so he's gathering all the people together.

And Jephthah then made a vow to the Lord. And this is what we'll deal with next time. He said, If you will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the people of Ammon shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.

So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the Lord delivered them into his hands. Who did? The Lord. The Spirit of the Lord was upon him.

The Lord delivered them into his hands, and he defeated them from Aror as far as Mineth, Mineth, or Mineth, 20 cities, and to Abel-Karamim with a very great slaughter.

Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel. A great victory. Heroic victory. But of course, again, let's remember that his heroism, his courage in heroism, his great victory, was brought about by the Lord.

[39 : 49] Thank you.