

Judges, Sermon #38

Judges 11 – Jephthah the Judge

Tonight is more story and narrative—work our way through Scripture tonight.

Vs. 4-8 – Let us stand for the reading.

Let us pray.

Jephthah is called from exile to leadership. Why? Because he knew how to fight. He was a “mighty man of valor” (v. 1)

Israel was in need of a fighting man.

They needed more than a fighter and God knew that.

God was in control of Jephthah’s life!—God was working behind the scenes.

How do we know that? Look at verse 9.

Jephthah recognized God as their ultimate Deliverer, not himself (vs. 9).

His trust was in the Lord, not in his own might.

As we shall see, Jephthah is a wise leader.

Jephthah is called to fight; but before he accepts, he lays out the conditions with his fellow countrymen.

He wants to be sure that they are not just using Him (vs. 9)

He wants to make sure they will not despise and reject him again, so they commit to a contract (vs. 10).

If Jephthah will come and fight, he will be able to return home and be the captain over all of Gilead.

He was wise in that he laid out the ground rules because these are the very snakes that kicked him out of the land previously.

Without this agreement, who knows where Jephthah would have ended up after the war.

Vs. 11-12

Jephthah does not shoot first and ask questions later.

In this section, we will notice that Jephthah did not fight ignorantly—even though he was a great fighter.

He tries to avoid war.

Jephthah knew that a war would result in thousands of people being killed; and he wanted to avoid that if at all possible.

Jephthah begins his leadership and his war strategy with some diplomacy.

In vs. 13, he finds out the reason for the battle.

He discovers why Ammon wars with Israel (vs. 13)

The King of Ammon declared that he and his men were only reclaiming land that the Jews, under the leadership of Moses, had stolen from them.

If Israel would restore that land, he would call off his troops.

Jephthah tries to reason peace through four different arguments.

Jephthah was grounded in the Word enough to present four persuasive and powerful arguments to the King of Ammon.

A. Argument #1 – vs. 14-22

First, he presented the facts of history (vv. 14-22)

Moses and his people had asked the Ammonites for safe passage through their territory, a request that the Ammonites would not grant.

This led to war, and God gave the Jews the victory.

Israel didn't *steal* any land; they *captured* it from the Ammonites and the Amorites (Num. 21:21-35).

Furthermore, the Amorites had originally taken the land from the Moabites (Num. 21:29).

The historical view shows that Israel won the land fair and square and even tried not to fight.

They simply wanted to cross the land, but when told no, they were forced to fight and possess it.

This section of Scripture reveals Jephthah knew the Scriptures, especially the history of Israel—he knows God's Word.

B. Argument #2 – vs. 23-24

His second argument was that the Lord had given Israel the land (vv. 23-24).

Jephthah was always careful to give the Lord the glory for any victories Israel won.

In vs. 21, 23, and 24, Jephthah states that God delivered the land unto Israel.

Therefore, why shouldn't we just live in the land that our God's has provided for us?

C. Argument #3 – vs. 25-26

Israel lived in the land for centuries.

For three hundred years the Ammonites didn't try to reclaim this territory.

If they had a legitimate claim, they would have spoken up centuries ago.

D. Argument #4 – vs. 27-28

Jephthah's final argument was that the Ammonites were actually fighting against the Lord (vv. 27-28).

Jephthah hadn't declared war on Ammon; it was Ammon that declared war on Israel.

But if God gave Israel the land, then the Ammonites were declaring war on God; and that could only mean disaster and defeat for Ammon.

Jephthah had tried to reason with the King of Ammon, but he wouldn't listen.

So, Jephthah tried peaceful negotiations with the Ammonites, but the negotiations failed.

Nevertheless, this section does tell us two things about Jephthah:

- (1) He knew the Scriptures and the history of his people, and
- (2) He was not a hothead who was looking for a fight—he did not rely on his own personal strength and tactics.

You can't help but appreciate the way Jephthah emphasized the Lord in all his negotiations.

It was the Lord who would give the victory (11:9), not Jephthah.

Jephthah didn't see this war as a political opportunity for himself but as an occasion for trusting the Lord and serving Him.

In addition, the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that Jephthah was a man of faith, not simply an opportunist (Hebrews 11:32).

In vs. 28, we see that the king of the children of Ammon did not listen to the Godly wisdom of Jephthah.

Next week, we will see what happened and also read one of the most controversial passages of Scripture.

Let us stand for closing invitation.

1. Cool head—trying conflict resolution
2. Recognize whose strength—the Lord's

Who gives victory?—the Lord