

Judges, Sermon #39

Judges 11 – toughest passages/difficult passage

Pray

Last time, Jephthah tried to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Ammonites peaceably but to no avail (**vs. 28-29**).

Vs. 32

Empowered by the Spirit of God, Jephthah called for volunteers and mustered his army.

The Lord gave him victory over the Ammonites—Jephthah the judge, the savior, the deliverer of Israel.

This victory brought freedom and safety for the Jews.

The writer of Hebrews wrote that Jephthah was a man of faith (Heb. 11:32) and his victory was a victory of faith (Judges 11:9).

The circumstances of his birth and his family were not a handicap to him and should not be to us.

We must live and walk by faith.

Jephthah knew the Word of God; he rehearsed it.

God gives Jephthah the victory.

God's Spirit comes upon Jephthah in vs. 29, and in vs. 32.

God delivered the Ammonites into his hand.

God gave the victory.

While going out to battle, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord (**vs. 30-40**).

It was certainly acceptable to God for the Jews to make vows.

Deuteronomy 23:21-23, *“When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it [don’t be slow in paying it]: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee [guilty of sin]. But if thou shalt forbear to vow [don’t make vows], it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering [made the vow freely], according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth.”*

Vows were completely voluntary, but the Lord expected the people to fulfill them—if they made them.

That’s why Ecclesiastes 5:2a says, *“Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God . . .”*

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5, *“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay.”*

Jephthah’s vow (vs. 30): If God would give the Israelites victory over the Ammonites, Jephthah would sacrifice to the Lord whatever came out of his house when he arrived home.

God did give him victory, and Jephthah kept his promise.

But what was his vow and how did he keep it?

What actually happened to Jephthah’s daughter—was she given as a burnt offering?

Surely Jephthah knew that God did not approve of or accept human sacrifices.

And where would Jephthah offer his daughter as a sacrifice?

Sacrifices were only made at the Tabernacle altar and done by the Levite priest.

No priest of God would sacrifice Jephthah’s daughter.

Deuteronomy 12:31 forbids human sacrifices.

Also, there was a way to get out of this vow—Jephthah could have learned from any priest that paying the proper amount of money could have redeemed his daughter (Lev. 27:1-8).

Would God take seriously a vow that violated His Word?

Would a spirit-empowered man even make such a vow?

These are the questions and the quandary of this passage—did Jephthah kill his daughter?

Let's look at this passage.

What do we know about Jephthah thus far? Thumbs up or down?

Vs. 29 – the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him!

Look at Jephthah's vow in vs. 31.

Was this a rash vow? Should he have made it?

I believe he had confidence that God would win the battle long before this, so why the sudden vow?

It is a question many have asked.

In verse 34, we see that the first person to meet Jephthah on his return to home was his daughter. She was his only child.

Verse 35 reveals to us the sorrow of Jephthah over his vow.

As he sees his daughter, the rejoicing ends.

He states, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot go back." (vs. 35e)—
quality of the man/integrity.

In verse 36—the quality and character of his daughter—we find the daughter a willing responder to the vow.

She could have responded in several ways to her father's devotion to God but she did it willingly.

The daughter's last request comes in vs. 37.

She desires to go to the mountain and "bemoan her virginity."

She goes, and when she returns, Jephthah follows through with His vow to God.

Many believe that Jephthah did indeed offer his daughter as a burnt sacrifice to God.

I do not believe so.

I believe that Jephthah offered his daughter to a lifetime of virginity and devotion to God in the temple.

Let me give you some reasons why:

1. Jephthah was too acquainted with God's law to be ignorant of God's law concerning human sacrifices and also was aware of how to escape it—by paying money instead.
2. He was a hero or he wouldn't be mentioned in Hebrews 11:32.
3. If she was to be slain, then there was no point in emphasizing her virginity (vs. 37-39).
4. Jephthah could not offer a human sacrifice if the Spirit of the Lord was upon him.
5. Women were known to give their lives to God at the tabernacle in Shiloh (I Samuel 2:22; Exodus 38:8).

★Here is the key:

6. The conjunction in verse 31 could be "and/or" or "instead of." It would then read "shall surely be the Lord's or I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

The vow of Jephthah would then be two-fold.

The person would be dedicated to the Lord, like Samuel.

Remember Hannah gave Samuel to the Lord and he served where? Tabernacle

Or if it was an animal, it would be sacrificed to the Lord.

★ Nowhere in the text are we told that Jephthah actually killed his daughter, nor do we find anybody bewailing the girl's death.

The emphasis in Judges 11:37-40 is the fact that she remained a virgin.

Jephthah gave his daughter to the Lord to serve at the Tabernacle.

Notice that his daughter was obedient.

★ She did not understand his promise to be a burnt offering, but that she is not going to marry.

Those are her intentions, and she is to bewail the fact of her virginity.

She will not be presented as a bride to some man.

Her life is to be dedicated to the Lord.

This passage tells us that Jephthah's daughter did not get married—vs. 39.

Vs. 40

The word "lament" in verse 40 means "to celebrate."

Every year for four days, Jephthah's daughter was remembered in a special way.

Her dedication was celebrated, not her death.

Jephthah's daughter was a living sacrifice.

The significant factor is that Jephthah kept his vow.

His vow was something sacred—he did not trifle with it.

It was not a hollow promise.

My friend, God says, "Don't be rash with our mouth."

Christians today are notorious at making promises and commitments and breaking them.

Have we made a promise to God?

If we have, He wants us to keep it.

He keeps His Word. Let us keep our word.

How dependable are our statements?

If we say we are going to do something, do we do it?

If we can't keep our promises, then we should not make them!

If we tell our children they will be punished if they disobey our commands, then we must keep our word or else they will be nothing but idle threats.

If we tell someone we will be somewhere at a certain time, then be there by that time.

If we are going to be late, then notify them if possible.

We must keep our word—especially to the Lord.

God doesn't want promises for the future; He wants our obedience TODAY!

Let us stand for closing invitation.