



## A Study of the Book of Judges

### Lesson 10: Jephthah...Son of a Prostitute Judges 10:1-12:7

Last time we met we examined the shameful life and despicable end of Abimelech the despot.<sup>1</sup> He was Gideon's son by a concubine and he was an ambitious man. He wanted to be king but his birth and his place in his clan militated against that. I am speaking, of course, from a human perspective. It was not yet God's will for Israel to have a human king. Gideon had known that and though he seemingly approached the authority and manner of a king he rejected the idea of taking the throne either for himself or for his sons. But Abimelech...Gideon's son by a concubine...had another idea. Abimelech was driven by ambition...the ambition for preeminence.<sup>2</sup> His ambition drove him to murder 69 of his 70 of his brothers in order to advance his own cause to become the undisputed ruler in Israel...or at least in Shechem.

But over a period of just three years, YHWH turned the hearts of the men of Shechem against Abimelech. He turned their hearts against Abimelech and He turned Abimelech's heart against the men of Shechem. He pitted them against each other in order that they might become instruments of judgment toward

each other. In the end, Abimelech killed the men of Shechem but his conflict with the men of Shechem also led to his own death. Fire came out from the bramble king and burned them up but fire also came out from them and burned up the bramble king.

Now the remarkable thing about Abimelech's story is that it ought to have taught the Israelites a lesson. It ought to have taught them the reality that sin leads downward and had terrible consequences...but it didn't. The Israelites in Judges did not seem to learn from either God's graciousness or from God's judgment. In that sense they were very much like the Pharisees of Jesus' day that Jesus compared to children in the marketplace...children who refused to mourn during the funeral dirges and who refused to dance at the playing of a flute. There was just no getting through to them...there was no making them happy.

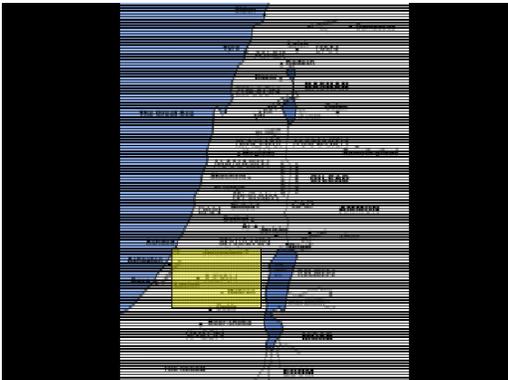
Now chapter nine of Judges closes with the thought that all of the Israelites returned to their homes....that is, that after Abimelech's death they all just went home.

Chapter 10 verse 1 follows that describing the three minor judges that followed after Abimelech.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 10:1**...After the time of Abimelech a man of Issachar, Tola son of Puah, the son of Dodo, rose to save Israel. He lived in Shamir, in the hill country of Ephraim. <sup>2</sup> He led Israel twenty-three years; then he died, and was buried in Shamir. <sup>3</sup> He was followed by Jair of Gilead, who led Israel twenty-two years. <sup>4</sup> He had thirty sons, who rode thirty donkeys. They controlled thirty towns in Gilead, which to this day are called Havvoth Jair.

Now the judges mentioned here at the beginning of chapter 10 are hardly discussed at all. The author tells us precious little about them. Some commentators think that they were included simply to represent some of the previously unmentioned tribes and I think that is probably about right.<sup>3</sup>

What is obvious is something I pointed early on in our study in Judges...and that is that the book of Judges has a general south to north movement. That is the book starts in the south and moves toward the north both in terms of the characters and tribes introduced but also in the action of the battles and attacks recorded.<sup>4</sup>



The funny thing about that is the further north the book moves the worse the sin of the characters involved. By the end of the book, in the epilogue, the characters involved seem to be right out of Sodom and Gomorrah.

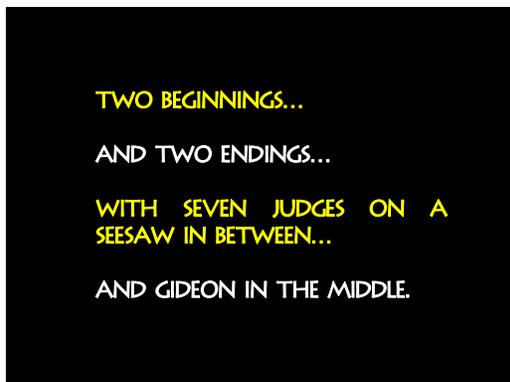
Now there could be any number of reasons for that. It could be that that is simply what happened. I have no problem with that being the case. But it could also be that the author unfolds the story of the Judges in a particular manner or sequence to accomplish a particular purpose.

I mentioned early on that I think he is pleading for the acceptance of the Davidic kingship.<sup>5</sup> Most scholars see the book as having been written much later...probably right after the time of the return from Babylon. That would mean that the author was appealing to the people to return to covenant fidelity to their Great Warrior King YHWH and worship in the southern capital of Jerusalem.

But I digress.

The point is that the Judges get worse as the book of Judges unfolds. I have to say while quickly saying that Abimelech cannot be considered a judge. He is never called a judge. He never delivers anybody. He was always and only a usurper.

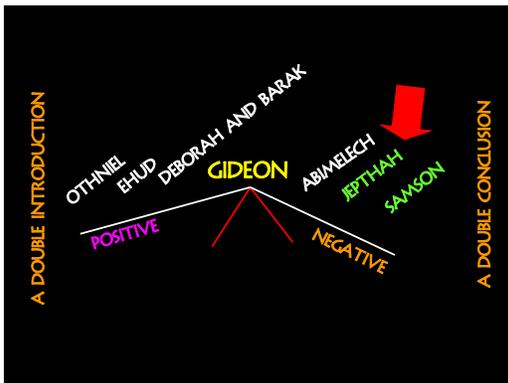
In that sense it would be wrong to say that Jephthah was a worse judge than Abimelech. It would be wrong because Abimelech was not a judge at all. But it is appropriate, I think, to say that there is downturn between Gideon and Jephthah and there is a downturn between Jephthah and Samson who follows after. That is why I have hammered that little phrase...



TWO BEGINNINGS...  
AND TWO ENDINGS...  
WITH SEVEN JUDGES ON A  
SEESAW IN BETWEEN...  
AND GIDEON IN THE MIDDLE.

Two beginnings and two endings...  
With seven Judges on a seesaw in between...  
And Gideon in the middle.

After Gideon things go downhill quickly. Now you can see that and see how the author of Judges begins to make that point starting in Judges 10:5.



<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 10:5**...When Jair died, he was buried in Kamon.<sup>6</sup> Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And because the Israelites forsook the LORD and no longer served him,<sup>7</sup> he became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites,<sup>8</sup> who that year shattered and crushed them.<sup>6</sup> For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites.<sup>9</sup> The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin and the house of Ephraim; and Israel was in great distress.

It is interesting that the word in verse 8 “shattered” (רָעַץ) is used. It is a particularly descriptive word used only here and in Exodus fifteen where it is used to describe what YHWH did to Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea. It seems to me that the author of Judges is trying to make clear the desperation of the

Israelites. They are like grain being crushed between two great stones. They were being attacked from both the east and the west.

Starting in verse ten, the author makes clear that this particular judgment is intended to be especially severe. Up to this point, the Israelites have never been attacked by two oppressors at the same time. Here it happens to show God's terrible judgment. In connection to that, the author points out the sevenfold apostasy of the Israelites.

**<sup>NIV</sup> Judges 10:10...Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, "We have sinned against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals." <sup>11</sup> The LORD replied, "When the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, <sup>12</sup> the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites (the LXX translates this group as the Midianites) oppressed you and you cried to me for help, did I not save you from their hands? <sup>13</sup> But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. <sup>14</sup> Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!" <sup>15</sup> But the Israelites said to the LORD, "We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now."**

Now there is a sense in which the indictment of the Lord against the Israelites is almost completely overwhelming. They had prostituted themselves with foreign gods and they had done so with foreign gods in abundance. When the Lord voices His complaint against them He produces a prodigious list...a list containing seven different gods. The Israelites had worshipped the gods of the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, The Philistines, Sidonians, Amalekites and Midianites. They had pretty much turned to worship every god except their own.<sup>7</sup>

Now you have to admit that is a terrible indictment.

But at last their oppression had become so terrible that even they saw the benefit of putting away their foreign gods. Verse 16 details their action and the result. Here they turn to God and say, **“If you must judge us, judge us only rescue us now. This is too much for us to endure.”**

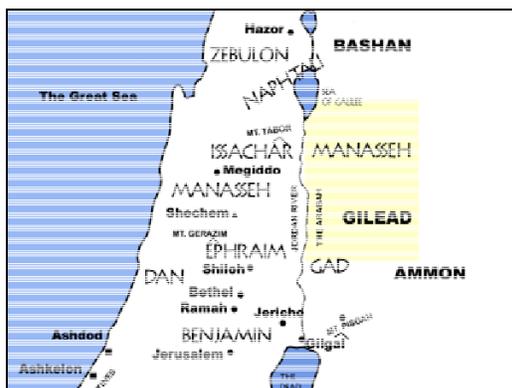
<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 10:16**...Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the LORD. And he could bear Israel's misery no longer.

Now, of course, just because they repented did not mean they were not still in a terrible strait. They were. They were still being oppressed by both the Philistines and the Ammonites.

The Ammonites in particular were terrorizing the inhabitants of Gilead.

You get a sense of the desperation of the Gileadites in verse 17 when they decide to make an extraordinary to anyone willing to attack their enemies.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 10:17**...When the Ammonites were called to arms and camped in Gilead, the Israelites assembled and camped at Mizpah.<sup>18</sup> The leaders of the people of Gilead said to each other, **“Whoever will launch the attack against the Ammonites will be the head of all those living in Gilead.”**



Now the question was...who was that deliverer going to be. Before I answer that question, I ought to say a word about Gilead. Gilead was at the same time a place, a clan and a person. First of all it was a place on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

When it was used to describe a place it was used to describe a fairly undefined piece of property. Using the word Gilead was a little like saying West Texas. It covered a bit of ground. As a territory, it was shared by three different tribes. Those tribes were Manasseh, Reuben and Gad (Joshua 13:8). Most scholars think that the name Gad may be a shortened form of the word Gilead.<sup>8</sup>

As a clan it was part of the tribe of Manasseh...who was one of the two sons of Joseph. If you ask anyone to name the twelve sons of Israel they will have to include the patriarch Joseph...but there was no tribe called Joseph and the reason for that was because Joseph did so good in preserving his people that his father Jacob gave him a double portion or blessing...so instead of being the one tribe of Joseph...which you never hear from again...there were the two tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim...named for Joseph's two sons.

Now stay with me for just a minute. That could mean that a person could be called a Gileadite because of where they lived or because of their ancestry. So it can get confusing. To make matters worse, there was also apparently a man named Gilead...and anyone related to him could also be called a Gileadite. Now in the case of Jephthah, he was all three. He lived in Gilead. He was from the tribe of Manasseh and his father's name was also Gilead. So he was the son of Gilead, from the clan of Gilead, living in the land of Gilead.

Now I bring that up because that would make it sound like he ought to have been the natural leader...simply on the basis of his pedigree. But that didn't matter very much...because Jephthah was an illegitimate son.

He is introduced in chapter 11.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 11:1**...Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. His father was Gilead; his mother was a prostitute.

Now before we go any further, I ought to say that that word "**prostitute**" is intended to get your attention. The idea is that the children of Israel "**prostituted themselves with other Gods**" and now they are going to be delivered by "**the son of a prostitute.**" If nothing else, Jephthah will be a reminder of their own moral failure and idolatry...but beyond that, what a terrible indictment of Israel that the best man among them was the son of a prostitute.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 11:2**...Gilead's wife also bore him sons, and when they were grown up, they drove Jephthah away. "**You are not going to get any inheritance in our family,**" they said, "**because you are the son of another woman.**"<sup>3</sup> So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the land of Tob, where a group of adventurers gathered around him and followed him.

Now there is something inexplicably sad about these few verses. Jephthah was rejected not because of his character or even because of any particular sin or action. No...he was rejected and hated for the sin of his father. Note the downward turn of birth position from the time of Gideon. Gideon was the least in his house...that is the youngest. Abimelech was the son of a concubine or a slave girl. Jephthah was the son of a prostitute. I should say that most scholars think that that means he was the son of a Canaanite woman because they cannot

stand the thought of any Israelite woman being a prostitute. But it seems to me that that is precisely the point. It is hard to see why an Israelite man would take the son of an illegitimate birth into his home as apparently Gilead did unless the prostitute was an Israelite. Now it is hard to know whether she was simply a street walker or whether she was a cultic prostitute...meaning a woman who engaged in temple prostitution in the worship of some pagan deity.

Either way, Jephthah was brought up with his brothers...brothers legally born to his father and his father's wives. At some point his brothers cast him out.<sup>9</sup> But Jephthah, unlike Abimelech had no place to go. He was on his own.

So he went of to the land of Tob as a freebooter...an adventurer and he gathered around a group of adventurers. The NIV calls them adventurers but the ESV and the NAS...worthless fellows. The KJV describes them as "**vain men**". The Hebrew word is "**empty**" and it can mean either "**poor**" or "**poor in character**". It doesn't mean they were necessarily evil but it almost certainly implies they were wild.<sup>10</sup>

Anyway, Jephthah gained quite a reputation as a soldier. Look at verse 4.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 11:4**...Some time later, when the Ammonites made war on Israel,<sup>5</sup> the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob.<sup>6</sup> "**Come,**" they said, "**be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites.**"<sup>7</sup> Jephthah said to them, "**Didn't you hate me and drive me from my father's house? Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?**"<sup>8</sup> The elders of Gilead said to him, "**Nevertheless, we are turning to you now; come with us to fight the Ammonites, and you will be our head over all who live in Gilead.**"<sup>9</sup> Jephthah answered, "**Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the LORD gives them to me-- will I really be your head?**"<sup>10</sup> The elders of Gilead replied, "**The LORD is our witness; we will certainly do as you say.**"

Now there is an implied apology on the part of the leaders of Gilead. They are saying, **“We may have done you wrong but we need you now and are willing to make things right.”** In very many ways, what they say to Jephthah is quite similar to what they said to YHWH in chapter 10. In chapter 10, they appealed to the Lord to rescue them right then even if he had to deal with them harshly afterward. They seem to be doing the same with Jephthah here. He is simply the lesser of two evils.

Now there was a reason why they were slow to accept Jephthah. The law called for the exclusion of someone born illegitimately down to the tenth generation. Of course, the Lord had the prerogative to lay aside that stipulation whenever HE chose but every Israelite was aware of it. You can see what I am talking about in Deuteronomy 23:2.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Deuteronomy 23:2**...No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation.

Here's what that means...and the reason I am making the point is because I want you to see just how extraordinary it is for them to ask Jephthah to help them. Deuteronomy 23 says that a person of illegitimate birth cannot enter the congregation of the Lord down to the tenth generation. Now, I think it is important to note that all of that legislation is fulfilled in Christ and passed away and I for one am so grateful that it is but it is important that you understand how important it was to the Israelites.

As a matter of fact, a man, any man, would have been excluded from leadership until ten generations had passed. That means that neither he nor his sons could hold a position of leadership until ten generations had passed.

Now, I want you to look for a moment at Genesis 38:29. It is the story of Judah and Tamar. Tamar was married to one of Judah's sons and when he died and left Tamar childless...Judah failed to provide a husband for her as he should have done under the terms of a levirate marriage.

Anyway, Tamar desperate for a seed decided to trick Judah and dressed up like a prostitute and attracted Judah who went into her...the result was that she conceived and bore a son...a son who was illegitimate.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Genesis 38:29**...But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, "So this is how you have broken out!" And he was named Perez.

Now stay with me for just a moment. Judah had an illegitimate son named Perez. Now I bring that up because King David a direct descendant of Perez.

Now...just one other passage...Ruth 4:18.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ruth 4:18**...This, then, is the family line of Perez; Perez was the father of Hezron, <sup>19</sup> Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, <sup>20</sup> Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, <sup>21</sup> Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, <sup>22</sup> Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

Now if you count the number of names...you will see that there are ten names and the point is that David had every legal right to rule in Israel...there was no

longer any stigma attached to his being a descendant of Perez...because ten generations had passed.

But in the days of the Judges...in the days of Jephthah...it was different. The best man they could get was an outcast to his people...was the son of a prostitute. The people had prostituted themselves before God and God was about to give them a deliverer that looked like them.

Anyway, Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead and they covenanted together before the Lord at Mizpah.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 11:11**...So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them. And he repeated all his words before the LORD in Mizpah.

Now the interesting thing about that we expect for Jephthah to strap on his sword and go after the Ammonites immediately. But that doesn't happen. Instead, Jephthah appeals to the Ammonites...rationally and calmly. Look at verse 12.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 11:12**...Then Jephthah sent messengers to the Ammonite king with the question: **"What do you have against us that you have attacked our country?"** <sup>13</sup> The king of the Ammonites answered Jephthah's messengers, **"When Israel came up out of Egypt, they took away my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, all the way to the Jordan. Now give it back peaceably."** <sup>14</sup> Jephthah sent back messengers to the Ammonite king, <sup>15</sup> saying: **"This is what Jephthah says: Israel did not take the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites.** <sup>16</sup> **But when they came up out of Egypt, Israel went through the desert to the Red Sea and on to Kadesh.** <sup>17</sup> **Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, 'Give us permission to go through your country,' but the king of Edom would not listen. They sent also to the king of Moab, and he refused. So Israel stayed at**

**Kadesh.** <sup>18</sup> "Next they traveled through the desert, skirted the lands of Edom and Moab, passed along the eastern side of the country of Moab, and camped on the other side of the Arnon. They did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon (a river) was its border. <sup>19</sup> "Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon, and said to him, 'Let us pass through your country to our own place.' <sup>20</sup> Sihon, however, did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. He mustered all his men and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel. <sup>21</sup> Then the LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his men into Israel's hands, and they defeated them. Israel took over all the land of the Amorites who lived in that country, <sup>22</sup> capturing all of it from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the desert to the Jordan. <sup>23</sup> "Now since the LORD, the God of Israel, has driven the Amorites out before his people Israel, what right have you to take it over?"

Now let me help you track the argument. The Ammonites had previously owned the land of Gilead. They were displaced by the Amorites. When the Israelites came into the land they displaced the Amorites. Jephthah's argument goes like this, **"We did not take the land away from you. We took it away from the people who took it away from you...the Amorites. We have every legal right to the land. You have no legal claim."**

Anyway, that is Jephthah's argument and the most striking thing about his argument is his wonderful knowledge and appreciation of his own people's history. It seems to me that he has a wonderful sense of God's deliverance of the nation. It seems to me that he a pretty good historian.

He continues his argument in verse 24.

**<sup>NIV</sup> Judges 11:23..."Now since the LORD, the God of Israel, has driven the Amorites out before his people Israel, what right have you to take it over? <sup>24</sup> Will you not take what your god Chemosh gives you? Likewise, whatever the LORD our God has given us, we will possess. <sup>25</sup> Are you better than Balak son**

of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever quarrel with Israel or fight with them?<sup>26</sup> For three hundred years Israel occupied Heshbon, Aroer, the surrounding settlements and all the towns along the Arnon. Why didn't you retake them during that time?<sup>27</sup> I have not wronged you, but you are doing me wrong by waging war against me. Let the LORD, the Judge, decide the dispute this day between the Israelites and the Ammonites."

Do you see what he is saying? He is saying, "We have a legal right to the land. If there is an argument...it is between our Gods."

However, Jephthah's argument falls on deaf ears.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Judges 11:28...** The king of Ammon, however, paid no attention to the message Jephthah sent him.<sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites.<sup>30</sup> And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands,<sup>31</sup> whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."<sup>32</sup> Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands.<sup>33</sup> He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon.<sup>34</sup> When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter.<sup>35</sup> When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break."<sup>36</sup> "My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites.<sup>37</sup> But grant me this one request," she said. "Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry."<sup>38</sup> "You may go," he said. And he let her go for two months. She and the girls went into the hills and wept because she would never marry.<sup>39</sup> After the two months, she returned to her father and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin. From this comes the Israelite custom<sup>40</sup> that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Now the question is, **“What does that mean? Did he really, really sacrifice his daughter?”**

Until the twelfth century AD, no one ever doubted that as the proper interpretation of the passage.

Josephus, the famous Jewish historian wrote this:

Accordingly, when that time was over, he sacrificed his daughter as a burnt-offering, offering such an oblation as was neither conformable to the law nor acceptable to God, not weighing with himself what opinion the hearers would have of such a practice.<sup>12</sup>

But in the twelfth century AD, a Jewish Rabbi proposed a different interpretation...and you can see why he would have. He simply could not imagine a Jewish judge doing such a reprehensible thing. Obviously, human sacrifice is forbidden in the Old Testament. That is interesting because it seems that Jephthah had a pretty good understanding of the Old Testament. I made the point earlier that he seemed to know his history pretty well...and he would have learned that history from the Bible.<sup>13</sup>

Leviticus 27 even provide the opportunity for a man to redeem a vow...that is, if he makes a vow and can't fulfill it, he could redeem that vow by paying money.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Leviticus 27:1**...The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate persons to the LORD by giving equivalent values, <sup>3</sup> set the value of a male between the ages of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel; <sup>4</sup> and if it is a female, set her value at thirty shekels. <sup>5</sup> If it is a person between the ages of five and twenty, set the value of a male at twenty shekels and of a female at ten shekels.

But Jephthah doesn't do that. The text says that he did all that he vowed to do in his vow.<sup>14</sup>

Now the Jewish commentator I mentioned says that what that meant is that Jephthah committed to perpetual chastity and virginity by making her to be a lifelong servant in the temple. Now let me ask you, **"Where would a person get that from the text?"** I certainly don't see it there.

Now either way, the point is that this rash vow means the end of the dynasty of Jephthah. Whether he sacrifices her to the flames or to perpetual virginity...there will be no continuation of the House of Jephthah.

Anyway, the passage is one of the most argued in the Bible. Almost all modern commentators argue for the view that he committed her to a state of perpetual virginity in the temple. Almost all ancient commentators say he committed her to the flames.

I don't know what the proper answer is. I wish I could tell you with certainty one way or the other.

One of the reasons, I think, that most commentators argue that Jephthah could not have done such a terrible thing is because he is included in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews chapter 11. The thought is that no person who ever did something so despicable would have ever been included in the list of heroes in Hebrews 11.

Of course, the real question is, **"What did he expect to have happen? Why did he make such a rash and idiotic vow in the first place?"** I think the answer to

that question is that the Israelites had come to view YHWH in much the same way the surrounding pagans viewed their gods...that is, it seems to me that the Israelites had come to think that they needed to appease God...with some sort of special sacrifice...something like when King Manasseh sacrificed his child to the god Molech.

<sup>NIV</sup> **2 Kings 21:1**...Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years... <sup>2</sup> He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. <sup>3</sup> He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. <sup>4</sup> He built altars in the temple of the LORD...<sup>6</sup> He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced sorcery and divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger.

Now the funny thing about that is that idea of trying to appease God is a natural impulse in a fallen human heart.<sup>15</sup> It seems like we just naturally think that if we give up something...God will like us better...will bless us more...but brothers and sisters our relationship to God is based upon the covenant faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ. I think if it does nothing else, this passage shows us the darkness of the time and the glorious light of the gospel...that we do not have to appease God...that we do not have to placate Him...He has already been placated. What a wonderful truth that is.

We do not have to strive to make him happy. He is happy already and the reason He is happy is because of Christ's obedience in our place. That means we are free to serve Him...not out of fear and trembling but out of gratitude for His mercy and kindness to us in Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we are most blessed.

Of course, the question remains, **“What happened?”**

I think that notion that he sacrificed his daughter fits very well with the darkness of the book of Judges...I think that fits a lot better than the idea of his having committed her to a life of perpetual virginity. One Jewish commentator from around the fifteenth century even said, **“God forbid that we should think that being committed to the temple for lifelong service to YHWH should ever be thought of as a sad thing.”**

I think that is really insightful comment. What’s sad about that?

This woman is bewailing her virginity, I think, because she is never going to have any children and she not going to have any children because she is going to die. It is a terribly dark picture.

The book of Judges is headed downward...and it will continue on down even further when we get to Samson.

So what is the lesson for us today?

There are so many I think.

Our relationship to our covenant children is most important. We have to commit ourselves to that relationship and be faithful stewards and guardians of those precious lives God has committed to our care.

Secondly, we ought to serve God with gratitude. We don't have to try to make deals with Him.

Finally, we ought to be especially careful not to make rash vows. We ought to think carefully about the things we commit to the Lord.

All of those things are true and as we contemplate those things and the darkness of that scene we ought to fall on our faces before God and praise His holy name because we are where we are this side of the cross and that we possess what we possess because of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

We are most blessed...let us rejoice and be glad.

Let's pray.

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Wood, *The Distressing Days of the Judges*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1975), 234. Woods notes, "The story of Abimelech is unique in the Book of Judges. Abimelech was not a judge and he did not deliver the country from any outside oppressor. Rather, he was crowned as a king in Shechem, ruled in an improper fashion for three years, and then died a humiliating death as punishment from God."

<sup>2</sup> J.A. Wilcock, *The Message of Judges*, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 89-90. "The first two verses of this chapter set the tone: the leading figure in it will not be a person raised up by God either as a scourge or as a savior; what brings him to center stage is the fact that he is a son of Gideon. The place and the people involved belong neither to Israel nor to Israel's enemies; they are Shechemite, and have a long-standing relationship with Israel dating back to the days of Jacob himself, before Jacob's family had even migrated to Egypt, let alone returned from it.' Authority in Judges 9 is a matter not of judging or of delivering, but of ruling, the ominous word first introduced when Israel offered the kingship to Gideon (8:22). And it may occur to us as we go on to read the whole story of Abimelech that nowhere in it, from 8:34 to 10:6, is the Lord mentioned by name.

All this unexpectedness re-opens the question of the value of the book for those who read it today. However they apply to themselves the narratives of Moses' time or of David's time, they have to re-tune in order to hear clearly what the judges are saying to them. But having worked

out what kind of lesson they should learn from Ehud and Deborah and Gideon, they find that that method also now goes by the board. Surely Abimelech is not what I ought to be?"

<sup>3</sup> Jay G. Williams, "The Structure of Judges 2:6-16:31" in the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* no 49 F 1991, p 77-86. "The fact that there are exactly twelve judges who represent, either explicitly or by implication, the twelve tribes of Israel is also significant.

<sup>4</sup> William J. Dumbrell, "'In Those Days There Was No King in Israel; Every Man Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes.' The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered." In *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (1983), 25. "The narratives have been arranged geographically by tribes, ranging from Judah in the south (3:9) to Benjamin (3:15), to Ephraim in the centre (4:5), to Manasseh (6:15), to Gilead (and thus Gad?-in 11:1), and to Dan in the north (13:2)"

<sup>5</sup> Robert H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 16. "Judah hold the preeminent position in this tribal arrangement. An implicit promotion of Judah through the structural arrangement in Judges would comport with an ideology, elsewhere evident in Israel's tradition, in which Judah was predestined, both through patriarchal blessing and divine election to rule among Israel's tribes."

<sup>6</sup> C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume 2...Joshua-2 Samuel*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1984), 357. This is the first reference to Israel being attacked simultaneously by two enemies. The visual idea is that Israel is being crushed or shattered by two stones, one from the east and one from the west.

<sup>7</sup> Wilcock, 106. "As well as being the start of the Jephthah story, these paragraphs mark the half-way point of the book. They remind us again that Judges describes not a circle but a spiral. We are back where we began — 'the people of Israel did what was evil' (2:11), 'the people of Israel again did what was evil' (10:6) — but we are now at a considerably lower level than we were then. It is true that other earlier oppressions have been as long as, or even longer than, the eighteen years during which Philistines and Ammonites *now* jointly oppress Israel. But there are plain signs of deterioration. 'All the people of Israel' are 'crushed' and 'sorely distressed' (10:8—9). What Israel does and what the Lord says both show how much worse things have become. Israel's offence is rehearsed at length as a sevenfold rebellion. She has turned from the Lord to serve instead the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and the gods of Sidon, Syria, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia (10:6). The Lord's complaint is that the Israelites are rebelling in spite of his sevenfold deliverance of them, from Egyptians and Amorites, Ammonites and Philistines, Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites (10:11—12). One could say that with a merciful God who keeps rescuing them they have nothing to worry about. But of course the point is that a people that can still turn its back on a God who has helped it so often is placing itself almost beyond redemption, and certainly in the gravest of danger."

<sup>8</sup> Cf. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia article on "Gilead". It says..."but in any case it is clear that the bulk of Gilead fell to Gad, so that Gilead might stand for Gad."

<sup>9</sup> Arthur E. Cundall, and Leon. Morris, *Judges & Ruth*. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 154. "The cloud upon his birth appears greater than that of Abimelech. He was the

son of Gilead, whose name is identical with the grandson of Manasseh who was the founder of the clan, but his mother was a harlot, that is, a strange woman who may have been a non-Israelite. Living in his father's house Jephthah was deprived of his family rights by his illegitimacy and, unlike Abimelech, he had no share in his mother's clan. Eventually he was thrust out by his stepbrothers, an event which determined his whole future, for he became a brigand-chief over a group of outcasts and social misfits."

<sup>10</sup> Some commentators like Cundall and Morris focus on the potential negativity of the description and allude to the men as "misfits and social outcasts." Cf. Cundall, and Morris, 141. It is easy to see how that is possible...the usual OT reference is negative. Michal refers to David as acting like a "worthless fellow" when he dances before the Lord and Jeroboam is said to have gathered such men around himself in his rebellion against Rehoboam.

NIV **2 Samuel 6:20**...When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any **vulgar fellow** would!"

NIV **2 Chronicles 13:7** Some worthless scoundrels gathered around him and opposed Rehoboam son of Solomon when he was young and indecisive and not strong enough to resist them.

<sup>11</sup> Some people think that Jephthah's daughter's story is a Jewish retelling of the story of Iphigenia. The following article by Rachel Gross and Dale Grote, relating the story of Iphigenia is located at <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/i/iphigenia.html>. The idea that she is the model of Jephthah's daughter is, of course, nonsense.

Iphigenia is best known as the daughter [Agamemnon](#), leader of the Greek forces at Troy, had to sacrifice in order to appease [Artemis](#). Agamemnon, or perhaps one of the troops in the Greek force of [Menelaus](#) (the brother of Agamemnon) offended Artemis, the virgin goddess of the hunt either by killing one of her sacred animals and/or by boasting immoderately that his hunting skill exceeded even that of Artemis. Artemis sent a contrary wind, which held the Greek fleet in the bay of Aulis, where it had assembled before sailing to Troy. The prophet Calchas divined that the daughter of Agamemnon would have to be sacrificed to atone for the offence. Agamemnon then summoned Iphigenia from home under the ruse that she was to be married to [Achilles](#). When the sacrifice was about to be made, however, Iphigenia is miraculously transported to Taurus, a city on the Black Sea, and an animal sent in her place.

It is interesting, and perhaps significant, that the story of Iphigenia's sacrifice is not mentioned in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, despite there being ample opportunity and reason to do so. The earliest source for the story is in the report we have of the lost Homeric *Cypria* (which is usually thought to date one to two centuries after the Homeric epics). In the next source, Aeschylus' play *The Libation Bearers* (c. 460 BCE), [Clytemnestra](#), the wife of Agamemnon, mentioned the killing of Iphigenia as part of her justification for killing Agamemnon upon his return to Mycene after the Trojan War. The two plays of Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and *Iphigenia at Tauris*, are centered on the story of Iphigenia. The story also gets minor mention in Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women* and *Eoiae* 71, which reports that she was changed into the goddess [Hecate](#) instead of being sacrificed.

The complexity of Iphigenia's story is present in many of the heroines of Greek mythology. Many of them appear either to have been goddesses in earlier times--which powers they have lost in the historical period--or are so similar to known goddesses that they appear to be hardly more than a different name for the same divinity. Iphigenia is so closely associated with Artemis, that her name is frequently seen as a mere epithet for Artemis (H.J. Rose p. 119.), which justifies the suspicion that Iphigenia might have originally been another competing virgin goddess of the hunt, whose character and functions were subsumed by Artemis.

**Pronunciation:** if-uh-juh-ny'-uh

<sup>12</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities* 5.7.10.

<sup>13</sup> Emil G. Hirsch, "Jephtha" in the Jewish Encyclopedia Online at [www.jewishencyclopedia.com](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com). He writes, "Jephthah is represented by the Rabbis as an insignificant person. That vain men gathered about him (Judges xi. 3) was an illustration of the proverb that a sterile date-palm associates with fruitless trees (B. Ḳ. 92b). His name being mentioned in connection with Samuel's (I Sam. xii. 11) shows that even the most insignificant man, when appointed to a position of importance, must be treated by his contemporaries as if his character were equal to his office (R. H. 25b). He is classed with the fools who do not distinguish between vows (Eccl. R. iv. 7); he was one of the three men (Ta'an. 4a), or according to other authorities one of the four men (Gen. R. lx. 3), who made imprudent vows, but he was the only one who had occasion to deplore his imprudence. According to some commentators, among whom were Ḳimḥi and Levi b. Gershom, Jephthah only kept his daughter in seclusion. But in Targ. Yer. to Judges xi. 39 and the Midrash it is taken for granted that Jephthah immolated his daughter on the altar, which is regarded as a criminal act; for he might have applied to Phinehas to absolve him from his vow. But Jephthah was proud: "I, a judge of Israel, will not humiliate myself to my inferior." Neither was Phinehas, the high priest, willing to go to Jephthah. Both were punished: Jephthah died by an unnatural decaying of his body; fragments of flesh fell from his bones at intervals, and were buried where they fell, so that his body was distributed in many places (comp. Judges xii. 7, Hebr.). Phinehas was abandoned by the Holy Spirit (Gen. R. l.c.)."

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, *Vol. 54: Volume 54: Table Talk* in Luther's Works (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1999, c1967). Luther writes, "When I asked about the passage in which it is written that she bewailed her virginity, he [Martin Luther] replied that the reason for the lamentation was that she would die without offspring. 'The Jews regarded this as the greatest calamity. So the mother of Samuel almost went mad because she was childless. I did, too, when I was first married and God put me to the test, for a child, as they say, is the best wool that one can shear from the sheep.'"

<sup>15</sup> Luther once said, "When it was reported from the war against the Turks that our soldiers were carrying various slips of paper inscribed with Turkish letters in the belief that the soldiers would thereby be protected against all arms, he [Martin Luther] said, "Even saintly men sin when they are in danger, and so it isn't to be wondered at that the heathen make use of magic. So Jephthah made a vow concerning his daughter, although he didn't have her in mind. A wrong was done to his daughter, and so he sinned."