

Judges 11:1 ¶ Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he *was* the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah.

Judges 11:2 And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou *art* the son of a strange woman.

Judges 11:3 Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

At the end of the last chapter, it was noted that the people of Israel sought a volunteer to lead their troops into battle against the forces of Ammon.

As this chapter opens, we are introduced to a man named Jephthah, a mighty man of valor from Gilead who was a son of Gilead by a harlot. Gilead's wife gave him many sons that refused to recognize Jephthah as their brother because his mother was another woman's son, a harlot at that, possibly even a foreign woman. Jephthah ran away to dwell in the land of Tob and gathered a following of "worthless" (from the Hebrew) men. Adam Clarke describes them as "...persons destitute of good sense, and profligate in their manners. The word may, however, mean in this place poor persons, without property, and without employment. The versions in general consider them as plunderers."

According to Easton's Dictionary, Tob was about 13 miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee on the east side of the Jordan River. This was north of Gilead.

Judges 11:4 ¶ And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel.

Judges 11:5 And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob:

Judges 11:6 And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon.

Now we connect back to the end of the last chapter when Ammon has gathered together to make war against Israel. The leading men of Gilead went to find Jephthah because he was known as a mighty man of valor. They pleaded with him to come and lead them to battle against the forces of Ammon.

Judges 11:7 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?

Judges 11:8 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

Judges 11:9 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head?

Judges 11:10 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words.

Judges 11:11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words

before the LORD in Mizpeh.

Jephthah reminded them that they had treated him like an outcast though they were sons of the same father. He basically said, "Why should I help you now?" The men of Gilead repeated their request that he lead them into battle against the Ammonites and added that they would make him their ruler if he would. Jephthah then had them confirm that he had heard them correctly. The leaders of Gilead called on the LORD as witness that they meant what they said. So Jephthah went with them, and they made him their captain.

I think it is important to note that Jephthah realized that he could only gain the victory if "the LORD deliver them before me." He knew that without the LORD on their side, they could not be victorious. This is a principle that is repeated by the LORD Jesus and is important for us to remember.

John 15:5 "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

I think the last part of verse 11 is saying that Jephthah then had the troops gathered at Mizpeh listen to and confirm the contract that he had made with the men of Gilead with the LORD as his witness.

Judges 11:12 ¶ And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?

Judges 11:13 And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those *lands* again peaceably.

Jephthah first sent messengers to the king of Ammon asking why he was leading an attack against Israel. The king answered that it was because Israel had taken their land away from them after coming out of Egypt, and they wanted their land back. He asked Jephthah to return the land to them without the need for war.

Judges 11:14 And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon:

Judges 11:15 And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon:

Judges 11:16 But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh;

Judges 11:17 Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken *thereto*. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not *consent*: and Israel abode in Kadesh.

Jephthah responded to the king by explaining that Israel did not take away the land of Moab or of Ammon. When Israel came out of Egypt through the wilderness of the Red sea to Kadesh, they sent messengers to the king of Edom

asking for permission to pass through his land, but he refused them passage. The same request was made of the king of Moab; he also refused them passage.

What Jephthah did not include in his message was that the LORD had forbidden the Israelites to fight Ammon and Moab.

Deuteronomy 2:9 & 19 "And the LORD said unto me, Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle: for I will not give thee of their land for a possession; because I have given Ar unto the children of Lot for a possession.... And when thou comest nigh over against the children of Ammon, distress them not, nor meddle with them: for I will not give thee of the land of the children of Ammon any possession; because I have given it unto the children of Lot for a possession."

Judges 11:18 Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon *was* the border of Moab.

Judges 11:19 And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place.

Judges 11:20 But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

Judges 11:21 And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.

Judges 11:22 And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan.

Judges 11:23 So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it?

Jephthah noted that the people of Israel had to go around the lands of Edom and Moab and were careful not to cross the border as defined by the Arnon River. Israel then sought permission from Sihon the king of the Amorites to pass through his land, and again they were refused. Sihon even gathered his people to make an attack on Israel. The LORD God of Israel gave Israel the victory that gave them possession of the land and its inhabitants. The land included the borders of the Amorites from the rivers Arnon to Jabbok and from the wilderness to the river Jordan. It was the LORD God of Israel that had given this land to Israel, so Ammon had no right to it.

Commentators note that the Amorites had originally conquered the Ammonites to take possession of the land.

Judges 11:24 Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess.

Judges 11:25 And now *art* thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against

them,

Judges 11:26 While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that *be* along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover *them* within that time?

Judges 11:27 Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon.

Judges 11:28 Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

Jephthah basically said, “You possess what Chemosh your god has given you, and Israel possesses what the LORD our God has given us. Are you better than Balak the king of Moab? He didn’t question our right to be here (though he had not wanted them there). We’ve been here for the last 300 years, and you have not bothered us before. Why now? Have we wronged you? The LORD “the Judge” will decide this issue.

The king of Ammon basically ignored Jephthah’s message.

It should be noted that there is an important principle in Jephthah’s message to the king of Ammon. It is the LORD God’s sovereign right to give Israel—or any other nation for that matter—the land that He chooses. In 1948 He reestablished the nation of Israel in the land of promise and has continued to enlarge their possession since that time by giving them victory over their enemies—in spite of the odds against them. The nations refuse to recognize that right and persist in identifying Israel as occupiers and usurpers. If that is true of Israel, it is just as true of the United States.

Judges 11:29 ¶ Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over *unto* the children of Ammon.

Judges 11:30 And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,

Judges 11:31 Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

Important point—The Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah. This signified that the LORD was fighting with him. As he moved to attack the forces of Ammon, he made a vow to the LORD—a vow to which he should have given more thought. He vowed that if the LORD would give him the victory, he would give to the LORD and offer up as a burnt offering to the LORD the first thing that came out of the doors of his home to meet him when he returned home in peace.

What did he expect to come out of those doors besides a person? The law of Moses strictly forbade human sacrifice.

Deuteronomy 12:31 “Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their

sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods."

I am reminded also that Jephthah's vow did not surprise the LORD; in his omniscience, He already knew that he would make it. I just don't believe He would have allowed him to sacrifice his daughter.

Adam Clarke offers the following explanation which makes sense to me: "...the translation of which, according to the most accurate Hebrew scholars, is this: I will consecrate it to the Lord, or I will offer it for a burnt-offering; that is, 'If it be a thing fit for a burnt-offering, it shall be made one; if fit for the service of God, it shall be consecrated to him.' That conditions of this kind must have been implied in the vow, is evident enough; to have been made without them, it must have been the vow of a heathen, or a madman. If a dog had met him, this could not have been made a burnt-offering; and if his neighbor or friend's wife, son, or daughter, etc., had been returning from a visit to his family, his vow gave him no right over them. Besides, human sacrifices were ever an abomination to the Lord...."

Judges 11:32 So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands.

Judges 11:33 And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

The LORD gave Jephthah a great victory, and he defeated 20 cities in the process.

Judges 11:34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she *was his only child*; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

Judges 11:35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.

When Jephthah returned home, his daughter was the first one out the doors to meet him dancing with tambourines. She was his only child. When he saw her, he tore his clothes in mourning as he remembered his rash vow. He told her that he had made a vow to the LORD and that she would suffer for it because he could not go back on his vow.

Judges 11:36 And she said unto him, My father, *if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD*, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, *even of the children of Ammon*.

Judges 11:37 And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows.

Judges 11:38 And he said, Go. And he sent her away *for two months*: and she

went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. **Judges 11:39** And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her *according* to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel, **Judges 11:40** *That* the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

Jephthah's daughter readily declared that he should keep his vow before the LORD, whatever that meant for her. She asked for two months to spend with her friends and mourn her virginity, and he granted her that time. When she returned home at the end of that time, he did with her according to his vow—and she knew no man. So it became a custom in Israel for four days each year for the daughters of Israel to commemorate (from the Hebrew) Jephthah's daughter.

The wording of verse 39 is troubling. It makes it sound like she was offered as a burnt offering. I just do not believe that to be true. The text makes a point of her virginity being associated with her time of mourning. She must have been consecrated to serve the LORD as a virgin for life. Maybe that means that she was given into service at the tabernacle.

I also think it should be noted that Jephthah was recognized in the great "hall of faith" chapter, and I do not think it would have been so had he so blatantly disregarded God's law.

Hebrews 11:32 "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae...."