

Jephthah, The Rejected Warrior. (Judges 11)

Background information:

Chapter 10:6, “And the sons of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD.”

It was not just one heathen god, but a whole list of deities from all different nations. This will explain God’s hesitation to rescue them yet again.

This time the nation has fallen into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites. The Philistines are living in the West, while the Ammonites are living in the East. The Ammonites are not to be confused with the Amorites. The Ammonites can be traced back to Lot’s incestuous union with his daughter in Gen. 19:38.

For 18 years, the Israelites have suffered at the hands of the Ammonites, so they cry out to God, confessing their sin and willingness to stop worshiping Baal. God says, “I’m not buying it. (vs 13). They persist until God finally responds, not because of their repentance, which is shallow, but because God could no longer bear to see their suffering. (vs 16)

I. Jephthah is rejected:

The hero in our story was rejected and His emotional pain was extreme. We don’t know much about his father, but he must have been a high member of society. The only problem is his mother was not. She was a prostitute. When his father died, the other sons cut him out of the will and kicked him out of town. Verse 2 says, “They “drove him away.”

In verse 3, Jephthah becomes a mighty warrior. As children of God, what do we do when faced with rejection? Go to the Bible. I believe that is exactly what Jephthah did. The man knows his Bible. In verse 12, “Jephthah sent messengers to the Ammonite king with this question: ‘What do you have against us that you have attacked our country?’

The king said, “We lost land in a battle 300 years ago and we want it back.” Jephthah says, let me tell some history (vs 15). The story of the battle (Josh 24:9).

Basically, he says that the Amorites, (who are like the Canaanites, Gen. 15:12) lost their land because their king went to war against them. All they wanted to do was pass through the land, but instead they attacked. Essentially Jephthah told the King; We won, God gave us the land, you’re not going to get it.

Here is a man who puts his trust in the Bible. He reads it and applies it, when facing this difficult situation. That’s a great lesson for us. When you feel discouraged, when you are facing a tough challenge, ask yourself, “What does the Bible say?”

II. Jephthah’s faith: Defeated the Ammonites Vs 32

Hebrews 11 is often called the “Faith Chapter” because it talks about the importance of faith.

In the chapter we read about the faith of Abraham, Moses and David. We read about women of faith like Sarah and Rahab. Out of all the people who ever lived in this world, only 16 people are used as examples of faith and guess whose name made the list? *Jephthah* (Heb. 11:32).

Jephthah was so impressive to God that we read something interesting in Judges 11:29. There it says, Jephthah went to war against the Ammonites and “The Spirit of the Lord came upon him.”

That is often how God works. He takes the broken people of this world, people who have been rejected and uses them to change the world. That’s what it says in 1 Cor 1:27.

Here was a man rejected by others, but because of his faith and trust in God he became a hero of faith. He became a man God could use to accomplish mighty things. The same is true for us. When we trust in God, when we have faith in God and allow him to use our abilities, we will do great things for the God.

III. Words Matter: Judges 11:30

It appears that Jephthah made a poorly worded vow and he sacrificed his daughter. Did he actually do it? Did he sacrifice his daughter? The passage doesn’t say exactly. It just says that Jephthah was devastated and afterwards He allows his daughter to have 2 months to grieve.

Verse 40 says, “Then the daughters of Israel went 4 days every year sorrowing for the daughter of Jephthah.”

I do have some answers to this dilemma. First of all, human sacrifices were not something God approved of. In fact, God destroyed entire nations for doing things like this. Second, in Lev 27:1-8, there is a provision in the law that allowed people to remove foolish vows.

What’s the lesson for us? Words matter:

When Jephthah confronts the king of the Ammonites, he retells the history of Israel recorded in the scriptures. The word of God matters. Jesus said, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4).

The words of Jephthah’s vow matters. How often do we see people today carelessly breaking their marriage vows?

Words mattered to the Ephraimites who attempted to cross the Jordan River, and could not say the word “Shibboleth.” (Judges 12:4-6)

The words we use are important. Prov 18:21, Matt 5:37, Matt 12:36, Prov 10:19.

Close:

It’s not the greatness of our deeds, but the gracious work of God through Jesus Christ that saves unworthy sinners. Jesus is the hero and He is the only one who can deliver us from sin.