

Series: Lessons From The Lives of the Judges

# JEPHTHATH VOWED A VOW

JUDGES 11:29-40

Text:

Introduction:

As we looked last week Jephthah was the son of a prostitute (vs. 1). His birth caused him problems with his half-brothers. After their father died, they refused to share the family inheritance with Jephthah and they forced him out of the family home (vs. 2-3).

Jephthah became the leader of a band of mercenaries who protected the people of Israel from their enemies.

Sometime later, the Ammonites attacked the Israelites (vs. 4). This promoted the leaders of Jephthah's tribe to reach out to him (vs. 5-6).

Apparently, they were familiar with his ability as a military leader. They ask Jephthah to come back and lead them to victory. If he will do that, they promise to make him the head of their tribe (vs. 7-10).

In verses 12-28 Jephthah tries a series of diplomatic measures to cool tensions with the Ammonites and avoid all out war. In correspondence with the king of Ammon, Jephthah learns that they are attacking Israel

because they want back some of the land that Israel took when it entered Canaan, (vs. 13).

Jephthah answers the Ammonites with several convincing arguments that prove they are wrong in attacking the people of Israel.

- Verses 14-22 – The Israelites did not take the land from the Ammonites. They took it from the Ammorites who originally took it from the Moabites. The Ammonites had no stake in the land at all.
- Verses 23-24 – The Lord had given the land to Israel. God was given all the glory and credit for giving them the land. Jephthah tells them to take what their god has given them and be satisfied.
- Verses 25-26 – Israel had lived in the land for hundreds of years. The Ammonites had not tried to claim the land during the three hundred years Israel had possessed, why were they attempting to claim it now?
- Verse 27 – The Ammonites are reminded that by attacking Israel, they are in fact attacking God! He will judge who is right and He will give the victory to whom He chooses!

The Ammonites fail to listen to the arguments put forth by Jephthah because they are ignorant of the Word of God; they do not care about the will of God; and they have no regard for the Person of God or the people of God. They press their attack against Israel.

When Jephthah attempted to negotiate with the Ammonites, he was not compromising. He stands firmly upon the Word of God and declares the facts of the situation. What he is doing is trying to prevent them from being annihilated in war. He knows that God will give Israel the victory and he is trying to save lives.

This brings us to our text verses. In these verses Jephthah has a valuable lesson to teach us. In these verses we witness a man who makes a rash vow that he lives to regret.

Jephthah teaches us that we need to take heed to every word that comes out of our mouths, and nowhere is that more true than when it comes to the words we speak to the Lord.

Notice:

# 1. JEPHTHAH'S VOW (VS. 29-31)

As Jephthah leads the armies of Gilead to battle, he makes a “vow” to the Lord. A “vow” is not something the Lord requires. To not make a vow is not a sin, but to make a vow and not keep it is a serious thing before the Lord. A “vow” is “a binding promise that involves a gift or sacrifice.” Vows in the Bible are never made to men, but always to God. I will talk more about what the Bible teaches about making vows to the Lord in a moment. Let’s consider Jephthah’s vow.

Note:

## A. The Context of His Vow (vs. 29-30)

### ***Judges 11:29-30***

*<sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,*

Jephthah made his vow to the Lord and he and his men were headed out to do battle with the Ammonites. Apparently, Jephthah wants to be certain of victory, so he tried to make a contract with the Lord. It’s one of

those “if you will do this for me, then I will do something for you.”

Note not only the context of his vow but also:

## B. The Content of His Vow (vs. 30-31)

### ***Judges 11:30-31***

*<sup>30</sup> And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, <sup>31</sup> 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.*

In this vow, Jephthah promises to offer up to God “whatsoever” comes out of his house first when he returns home in victory. Just a simple glance at this vow tells us how rash and foolish this vow really is. This is a truth that Jephthah will learn the hard way when he returns home.

That’s the problem with most of the promises we make to the Lord. We don’t take the time to think them through before we make them. Then, when things do not go exactly like we want them to, we will go back on our vows to Him. That is a dangerous thing.

Note not only the Context and Content of his vow but also:

### C. The Character of His Vow

Jephthah's vow was totally unnecessary!

In verse 29 we are told that “the Spirit of God was upon Jephthah”. God was going to give Jephthah and his army the victory just because he made the Lord a bunch of promises. Victory was assured anyway just because the Lord wanted to give it!

When Jephthah made the vow, even though it was unnecessary, it was also binding. The Lord gave Israel some very specific instructions for the use of vows:

#### ***Deuteronomy 23:21-25***

*<sup>21</sup> When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. <sup>22</sup>*

*But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. <sup>23</sup> That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth. <sup>24</sup> When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. <sup>25</sup> When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck*

*the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn.*

**Numbers 30:2**

*<sup>2</sup> If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.*

**Ecclesiastes 5:1-6**

*<sup>1</sup> Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. <sup>2</sup> Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. <sup>3</sup> For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. <sup>6</sup> Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?*

So, when you make a vow to the Lord, He will hold you to the keeping of that vow. It is far better not to

promise the Lord something than to make a promise to Him and to fail to carry out that promise.

Notice not only Jephthah's Vow but also:

## 2. JEPHTHAH'S VICTORY (vs. 32-33)

When the children of Israel faced the Ammonites on the field of battle, Israel carried the day. They defeated their enemy and won a great victory.

Note:

### A. It Was a Divine Victory (vs. 32)

#### ***Judges 11:32***

<sup>32</sup> *So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands.*

The battle was waged and the victory was won. The children of Ammon were defeated because the Lord "delivered" them up to the Israelites. It was a divine victory and God was given all the glory.

### B. It was a Decisive Victory (vs. 33)

#### ***Judges 11:33***

<sup>33</sup> *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 language of this verse tells us how complete this victory was. We are told that Jephthah “smote” the Ammonites.

This word means “to strike, smite, hit, beat, slay, kill”. We are told that Jephthah “smote” them with “a great slaughter”.

This phrase refers to “a great blow, wound, beating, or conquest.” It has the idea of being “overcome with a plague”.

The children of Israel swept down on the Ammonites and cut them down like a plague. It was an astounding and complete victory.

Note:

God can still give His people great and decisive victories in this life. He is still defeating enemies and overcoming all foes so that we can experience his power and deliverance in our lives. Regardless of what you might be facing today, the Lord can give you victory over it for His glory!

Notice not Jephthah’s Vow and Victory but also:

### 3. JEPHTHAH'S VIGILANCE (VS. 34-40)

The battle is over and the victory is secured. Jephthah returns home as a conquering hero. I am sure the vow he made to the Lord was fresh in his mind. He fully intended to carry out his vow. Among other things, Jephthah was a man of his word and he would not fail to do all that he promised to the Lord.

Note:

#### A. Jephthah's Pain (vs. 34-35)

##### ***Judges 11:34-35***

*<sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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 he arrives home, the first person who comes out to meet him is his daughter. She is his only child. She comes out to greet her father with songs of celebration because of the victory the Lord had given to His people. She is excited that her father has returned home safe, and that he is a hero.

When Jephthah sees her, his heart is broken. He has promised to give up “whatsoever cometh forth of the doors” of his house “to meet” him when he returned home, v. 31. He sees his only child coming to meet him, his precious daughter, and it breaks his heart because he knows what he has to do to her, and he fully intends to do it.

He tears his clothes in a sign of mourning and cries “Alas! My daughter...” the word “alas” is an expression of pain. It is the same as crying “Oh!” in the midst of a tragedy. Then he tells her that she has “brought” him “very low”. This phrase means “to bring one to his knees.” The thought of what he must do to his own daughter fills Jephthah with grief. The life is forced out of him. The thrill of his victory vanishes completely away and he is left with the searing pain of loss, and the overwhelming agony of loss.

Note not only Jephthah’s Pain but also:

#### B. Jephthah’s Problem (vs. 35)

##### ***Judges 11:35***

<sup>35</sup> *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 sees his daughter, he tells that he has made a vow concerning her. Jephthah knows that vow made to the Lord must be fulfilled. Apparently, Jephthah is a man of his word.

Jephthah's actions should speak to us.

We should also be a people of our word. When we tell someone we will do something, we should do it.

We should always do what we say we are going to do regardless of the personal cost or inconvenience.

When we give our word, we ought to be a people of our word. We ought to say what we mean, mean what we say and stand by our promises.

Note not only Jephthah's Pain and Promise but also:

### C. Jephthah's Performance (vs. 36-40)

#### ***Judges 11:36-40***

*<sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup>*

*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. <sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> 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, <sup>40</sup> That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.*

Jephthah's daughter encourages her father to do all that he has promised the Lord he would do. She only asks for some time to mourn her virginity. This girl was willing to make a huge sacrifice to help her father honor his vow to the Lord. She willingly gave up the joy of becoming a wife and mother. She sacrificed the dream of every Israelite girl that was the dream of giving birth to the Messiah. She sacrificed her dreams to help her father fulfill his vow to God.

She goes away with her friends for two months and they "bewailed her virginity". That is, they mourned with her that she would never be a wife or a mother.

When she returned home, her father fulfilled his vow to the Lord and did with her the thing he promised to do.

After that, (vs. 39) tells us that “she knew no man”. And her friends came every year for “four days” to “lament the daughter of Jephthah”, (vs. 40).

Close:

May we learn the lessons from this example.

Be careful of the vows that we make.

Let keep the vow that we make.