

## 20220206 - Judges Chapter 11 Jephthah – Knowing God and Knowing His Word

*11 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah. <sup>2</sup> Gilead's wife bore sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out, and said to him, "You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." <sup>3</sup> Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob; and worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out raiding with him. (Judges 11:1-3, NKJV).*

So, here we see that there was a man named Gilead who had a prostitute, and with her he produced a son named Jephthah. The text tells us that Jephthah was a warrior and a fighting man. Gilead had a bunch of other sons who ostracized Jephthah because he was illegitimate. So, Jephthah fled to the land of Tob. The text also tells us that a gang of thieves banded together with him, and spent their time out raiding and stealing from others with him. Jephthah and his gang were like those disenfranchised middle eastern young men we see that join ISIS. In such gangs they find a purpose and an identity. Jephthah was probably part Jew (from Gilead) but he was certainly part Canaanite by his prostitute mother. In fact, Josephus tells us that the mother of Jephthah was a "strange" woman, meaning that she was a Gentile. In spite of all of this, God used Jephthah for His purposes.<sup>1</sup> He was half Jew and half Gentile.

*<sup>4</sup> It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Israel. <sup>5</sup> And so it was, when the people of Ammon made war against Israel, that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. <sup>6</sup> Then they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon." <sup>7</sup> So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?" <sup>8</sup> And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." (Judges 11:4-8, NKJV).*

Here we see the elders of Gilead wanting to hire this band of thugs to come deliver them.

*<sup>9</sup> So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the LORD delivers them to me, shall I be your head?" <sup>10</sup> And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD will be a witness between us, if we do not do according to your words." <sup>11</sup> Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/ant-5.html>

*the people made him head and commander over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD in Mizpah. (Judges 11:9-11, NKJV).*

So, the people of the land hired him on as their thug. They needed a leader. We should note a distinction here between Gideon and Jephthah. Gideon was called by the Lord to deliver Israel, but *Jephthah was recruited and called by the people.*

*<sup>12</sup> Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, saying, "What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land?" <sup>13</sup> And the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and to the Jordan. Now therefore, restore those lands peaceably." (Judges 11:12-13, NKJV).*

Here we see the king of Ammon is going back several hundred years to the time when Israel first entered the land. The Israelites had been freed from Egypt and had gone to the places that God designated for them to possess. Those places were the inheritance that God had given them. Jephthah knew the history of Israel, and we see him recounting the true story of what had happened. First though, he sent ambassadors to talk to the kings of Ammon.

*<sup>14</sup> So Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, <sup>15</sup> and said to him, "Thus says Jephthah: 'Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon; <sup>16</sup> for when Israel came up from Egypt, they walked through the wilderness as far as the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. <sup>17</sup> Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let me pass through your land." But the king of Edom would not heed. And in like manner they sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So, Israel remained in Kadesh. <sup>18</sup> And they went along through the wilderness and bypassed the land of Edom and the land of Moab, came to the east side of the land of Moab, and encamped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the border of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab. <sup>19</sup> Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon; and Israel said to him, "Please let us pass through your land into our place." <sup>20</sup> But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together, encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. <sup>21</sup> And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. Thus, Israel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. <sup>22</sup> They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. (Judges 11:14-22, NKJV).*



This is so much like what has happened today in the land of Israel. When Israel was established as a nation in 1948, the entire Arab world brought war against Israel, rejecting what the United Nations had proposed as a division of the land. The neighboring Arab countries denied Israel's right to exist. When Israel won in the conflict, their territories increased. The same thing happened in 1967 when against all

odds, Israel once again defeated their neighbors, obtaining even more of the land which they now hold. Again and again the Palestinians vow to destroy Israel and lose more and more of what has been offered to them in various peace settlements. So in the text this morning, Jephthah is explaining a similar sequence of events that led to Israel being there. He is telling them that Israel had asked to pass peacefully through the land and were denied passage. He told them, "in fact you started a war against us and THAT is how we came into possession of everything that we won in war against you."

*<sup>23</sup> 'And now the LORD God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel; should you then possess it? <sup>24</sup> Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So, whatever the LORD our God takes possession of before us, we will possess. (Judges 11:23-24, NKJV).*

So Jephthah is telling them that it was God who gave this land into their possession, and that the Canaanite gods had given them nothing. He's telling them, "we'll just keep what God gave us, and you can keep the land that Chemosh gave to you."

*<sup>25</sup> And now, are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he ever fight against them? <sup>26</sup> While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon, for three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time?*

*<sup>27</sup> Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the LORD, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon.'" <sup>28</sup> However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him.*

*<sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon. <sup>30</sup> And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, <sup>31</sup> then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." (Judges 11:25-31, NKJV).*

Our passage starts with the statement “Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah.” So, just how did the Holy Spirit work in the times of the Old Testament? I don’t think it’s necessary or beneficial to try to parse out whether people were indwelt or whether the Holy Spirit just sort of “came down on them.” The Holy Spirit is Who He is, and He was the same then as He was now.

All in all, the Spirit performs much of the same functions in Old Testament times as He does in this current age. The major difference is the permanent indwelling of the Spirit in believers now. As Jesus said regarding this change in the Spirit’s ministry, “But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” ([John 14:17](#)).<sup>2</sup>

Let’s look now at this vow that Jephthah made. First off, we should be careful about what we say. We must remember that Jephthah had been raised by a Canaanite mother, and according to their custom, he made a vow. What we’re seeing here is Jephthah treating God as though he were a Canaanite god. God never supports human sacrifice anywhere in scripture. You see, Jephthah knows *about* God, but He doesn’t *know* Him very well. We’ll see that just knowing *about* God doesn’t teach us much about Who God is or what He expects of us. Jephthah knows Israel’s history, but he doesn’t know Israel’s God, Yahweh. God doesn’t deal with people this way. You know, I’ve sometimes treated God that way. Before I had walked with Him for a long time, I’d pray things like, “Lord help me sell this drill pipe and I’ll give you ten percent of whatever I make.” What that showed was just how immature my love for God was. I was trying to bargain with God as though He needed what I had to give and as though I was an equal with Him at the bargaining table. We make these weird vows because we’re trying to get God to get in line with our agenda. Instead, God wants to get us in line with HIS AGENDA. So church, let’s don’t make stupid vows to the Lord.

*<sup>32</sup> So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the LORD delivered them into his hands. <sup>33</sup> And he defeated them from Aroer as far as Minnith—twenty cities—and to Abel Keramim, with a very great slaughter. Thus, the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.*

*<sup>34</sup> When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. (Judges 11:32-34, NKJV).*

Remember the vow that he had made.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Spirit-Old-Testament.html>

*<sup>35</sup> And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it." (Judges 11:35, NKJV).*

Jephthah never expected his daughter to come out. Some commentaries say that he was expecting an animal to come out because they kept animals in their homes.

*<sup>36</sup> So she said to him, "My father, if you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon."<sup>37</sup> Then she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I."<sup>38</sup> So he said, "Go." And he sent her away for two months; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains.<sup>39</sup> And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man. And it became a custom in Israel<sup>40</sup> that the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite. (Judges 11:36-40, NKJV).*

This piece of scripture has been debated for centuries. So, let's quickly look at whether Jephthah offered his daughter as a human sacrifice, or if something else occurred.

- 1) Some say he went through with it and offered up his daughter as a burnt offering.
- 2) Others think he just caused her to be a virgin for the rest of her life. There are several ideas that support the position that he did NOT sacrifice his daughter.
  - a. Some say, he obviously knew the rules of Torah and would never have done that (Deuteronomy 18:9-14). God explicitly forbade human sacrifice at any time.
  - b. Others say that if he had tried to do this in Gilead, the other Jews would not have let it happen.
  - c. Another reason is because the Prophet Samuel and Hebrews chapter 12 speak favorably of Jephthah (1 Samuel 12:11, and Hebrews 11:32). He is mentioned in a positive light and that would have never been so if he had killed his daughter.
  - d. Finally, another "common view is that Jephthah gave his daughter to be a perpetual virgin in the service of Yahweh. Those holding this viewpoint state that Jephthah's vow was that whatever came forth from the doors of his house ... "shall surely be the LORD'S, or I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (v. 31). [This author notes that this is explained saying that the Hebrew letter/word "vaw" can

be translated as “and” or “or”.] The idea of perpetual **virginity** is strongly supported by verses 37–39. In any case, *the lesson* is that we should not make rash promises.<sup>3</sup>

There are some interesting verses concerning people being dedicated in the Torah in Leviticus 27. The passage says when a vow is made that the life of a woman can be redeemed for 10 shekels. Listen. *“If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate a person to the LORD by giving the equivalent value,<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> for a female, set her value at thirty shekels;<sup>5</sup> for 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.”* (Leviticus 27:2b-5, NIV).

Obviously, whatever had happened in this case of Jephthah’s daughter, Jephthah could have redeemed her life for 10 shekels. Jephthah fell into that weird thing that happens when we mix the the true faith with man’s false religion. That is called sycretism and it is never good.

Jephthah knew a little bit about God, but he didn’t itimately KNOW GOD. He knew about Israel’s history, but He didn’t know God’s word. This is a perfect example of why we need to not only know God, but we need to know His word. It keeps us from getting off into the spiritual weeds.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at [uniongrove362@gmail.com](mailto:uniongrove362@gmail.com) or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.

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<sup>3</sup> MacDonald, W. (1995). [\*Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments\*](#). (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 277). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.