

"Upon this rock I will build my church"

Matthew 16:18

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JEPHTHAH

INTRODUCTION:

- A. The story of Jephthah is typically thought of as confusing and difficult.
1. No doubt, parts of it are very difficult.
 2. But when the whole story is studied, it really should not be confusing.
- B. The texts for his life are:
1. Judges 10:6-12:7.
 2. Hebrews 11:32-40.
- C. Our approach to this study is to always remember--and never forget--that he is:
1. One of the judges of Judges 2:11-23.
 2. One of those who lived by faith in Hebrews 11:32-40.
- D. The purpose of this lesson is two-fold:
1. To learn WHY he is one of the men of faith in Hebrews 11.
 2. To interpret his life in light of that inspired assessment of his life!
- E. The story begins with a crucial background statement in Judges 10:6-18.
1. This text contains the following points:
 - a. The children of Israel did evil (again) and brought the hot anger of Jehovah upon themselves through their enemies for eighteen years (the Philistines and Ammonites; 10:6-9).
 - b. The children of Israel cried unto Jehovah, confessing their sins. Jehovah in turn told them to turn to the "gods" they were serving for deliverance (10:10-14).
 - c. The children of Israel confessed their sin and put away the false gods (10:15,16).
 - d. The Ammonites gathered for war against them, and the people of Gilead looked for a "head" to deliver them (10:17,18).
 2. Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures has two valuable statements, which can help us greatly at this transition point in our study.
 - a. "...the people of the nobles of Gilead,' i.e. all, without exception. No envious, self-seeking voice of protest or dissent was heard. In times in which distress is recognized with repentance, private interests cease to govern. People then begin to honor truth and actual merit. No deference is then paid to personal vanity, family connections, or wealth; but, all by-views and self-seeking being set aside, he is sought after who renders service. The nobles of Gilead could not more clearly indicate their new temper, than by untidily promising to subordinate themselves to him who begins to render the banners of Israel once more victorious, as their head...Him, who conquers with God, they desire to follow unanimously, as a common head...And this one soon appeared" (p. 161).

b, "The story of Jephthah is one of the most remarkable episodes of the Sacred Scriptures. But at the same time it is one of those episodes which, from being too exclusively considered in the character of disconnected fragments, have been subjected both anciently and in modern times to the most singular misapprehension and distortions. It gives the moral likeness of an Israelitish tribe, in the time of its awakening and return to God. Manasseh is again the cooperating tribe, not the western half, however, but the eastern, its equal in warlike spirit (I Chronicles 5:24) and strength, but holding a relation to the hero who appears among them different from that formerly held by the other toward Gideon. When Gideon entered on his work, everything depended on his own personality. No divine awakening had preceded, not even in his own city. In his own house, there was an altar to be destroyed. the number of those who deserved to be his followers was only three hundred. Even in the time of his success and greatness, it is he alone who keeps and upholds the divine life in the nation. "The history of Jephthah furnishes a different picture. Gilead too had sinned, but it had repented. The whole people had put away its false gods, before it found its hero. This hero, on his part, finds himself supported by a spiritually awakened tribe, thoroughly animated with the spirit of faith and obedience toward Jehovah. Every part of the picture is projected on a background of true piety. Jephthah is the hero, the leader, the head of the tribe: but he is not the only one whose eyes are fixed on God; the whole tribe, like members of the head, obey the same attraction" (p.162).

F. With this background, we can now study the life and work of Jephthah under seven headings.

1. His heritage (Judges 11:1-3).
2. His call (Judges 11:4-11)
3. His challenge (Judges 11:12-28)
4. His vow and victory (Judges 11:29-33)
5. His virgin daughter (Judges 11:34-40)
6. His conflict (Judges 12:1-6).
7. His legacy (Judges 12:7; Hebrews 11:32-40).

DISCUSSION:

I. HIS HERITAGE (Judges 11:1-3).

A. His characteristics (11:1).

1. A Gileadite (east of Jordan).
2. A mighty man of valor.
 - a. A brave hero.
 - b. The man they needed (10:18).
 - c. Gideon was also called this by the "Messenger" (6:12).
 3. Son of a harlot ("another woman").

4. Son of Gilead.
 - a. Some say this refers to the clan known as Gilead.
 - b. But the text goes on to say that he had sons by his wife (11:2a).
- B. His rejection (11:2).
 1. This was by his younger half-brothers.
 2. They drove him out because he had a different mother.
- C. His "preparation" (11:3).
 1. He fled his brothers and went to Tob.
 - a. Did he flee because he was weak--or because he was "valiant"?
 - b. Tob (II Samuel 10:6,8): Northeast of Perea, on the border of Syria.
 2. He spent time with "vain men."
 - a. "vain": empty, "adventurers."
 - b. He thus established himself as valiant (able); as David later did when he fled from Saul.
 - 1) See I Samuel 22:2; 23:1ff.
 - 2) "Though banished, he was a valiant guerrilla chieftain of his people against their enemies"

II. HIS CALL (Judges 11:4-11).

- A. Back to the story (11:4; see 10:6-18).
 1. "In process of time": a long period, considerable (the oppression was 18 years; 10:8).
 2. The war was between Ammon and Israel.
 - a. Ammon was a descendant of Lot.
 - b. Israel was still united.
- B. Invitation from the elders of Gilead (11:5,6).
 1. They went to him.
 2. They were his own people (Remember the brothers of Joseph--unknowingly going to his for help? Jephthah was a descendant of Joseph).
 3. They offered to make him captain.
 - a. A leader in war (Joshua 10:24).
 - b. Some say here that Jephthah was serving idols. Why would people who had already repented look to an apostate idol-worshiper to be their captain?
- C. Jephthah's response (11:7).
 1. He did not conceal what they had done to him.
 2. He asked questions that deserved honest answers.
- D. The elders' explanation (11:8).
 1. Were they now desiring to correct their wrong?
 2. They did make a noble request.
 - a. It was an invitation to a great responsibility, nationally and spiritually.
 - b. It was an invitation to great danger.
- E. Jephthah's clarification (11:9).
 1. The clarification involves his going home.

2. The clarification involves his becoming head when Jehovah delivered the enemy.
 - a. "Before me" (see Joshua 10:12; Deuteronomy 2:30).
 - b. He clearly states his understanding that Jehovah was the deliverer.
- F. The elders' vow (11:10).
 1. They make an oath in agreement with his proposition.
 2. They are following up on their penitence of chapter 10.
- G. An agreement is reached (11:11).
 1. They made him head and captain--chief in peace and war.
 2. These words were uttered "before the Lord"--confirmed all his words by an oath (Keil and Delitzsch).
 3. Mizpeh has not been definitely located.
 4. There is still no hint that Jephthah is anything but an able, thinking, careful, believer in Jehovah.

III. HIS CHALLENGE (Judges 11:12-28).

- A. Jephthah's first message to the king of Ammon (11:12).
 1. He sent messengers.
 2. He attempted to work through the dispute with words before using the sword.
- B. Ammon's first response (11:13).
 1. They said their land had been taken away in the past.
 - a. But see Deuteronomy 2:5,9,19.
 - b. See how far they really went in Numbers 21:26.
- C. Jephthah's second message (11:14-27).
 1. This is an important statement, but for the purposes of this lesson, we cannot study it in detail.
 2. But note that Jephthah still tries to resolve the issue with carefully stated facts, showing his excellent knowledge of his people's history. He also shows that the claims of the Ammonites are false. Then he challenges them to see if their "god" would (or could) give them the land!
- D. Ammon's second response (11:28).
 1. They did not take heed to the facts.
 2. A battle would decide the issue.

IV. HIS VOW AND VICTORY (Judges 11:29-33).

- A. The Spirit of Jehovah was with him (11:29).
 1. This is a key statement for those who desire to see Jephthah as the Lord did (see 3:10).
 2. He was now going to follow his noble words with splendid deeds (Lange, 169).
- B. The vow (11:30,31).
 1. Vows were (and still ought to be) very serious matters, never to be made without plenty of thought, and always to be made

within the limits of God's will.

a. It is my view that this was such a vow, and that Jephthah knew what he was doing.

b. "This vow has been the subject of the most singular misapprehensions, and yet, rightly understood, it crowns the deep piety of this hero of God" (Lange, p. 169).

c. Vows were to be signs of "deep self-surrender" (Psalm 61:8; 116:16ff; Isaiah 19:21; Deuteronomy 23:24; Numbers 30:2).

2. "Whatsoever comes": This phrase is only applied to human beings in other passages.

a. Jephthah was expecting to be met by a person.

b. The word "whatsoever" (or, whosoever) was not necessarily limited to the first person--he might have even been met by a crowd. Was he vowing to offer them all as burnt sacrifices? Surely not!

3. "To meet me": That is, whoever comes out; intentionally, not accidentally.

4. "When I return in peace": Great expectation that his commander in chief would provide the victory!

5. "Shall surely be the Lord's": This phrase is used to refer to something (someone) dedicated to the Lord for the rest of his life (Exodus 13:12,13; Number 3:12; I Samuel 1:28). This is another indication that he expected to be met by a person or persons--and that killing people was not what he meant.

6. "And I will offer it up for a burnt offering":

a. This is the term used in Genesis 22 in reference to Isaac.

b. After this, it became the "typical and technical term for an animal sacrifice, symbolic of perfect surrender and consecration to God" (Lange, p. 171).

c. Human sacrifices had been specifically prohibited (Deuteronomy 18:9 ff).

d. So what is the significance of the phrase in this context?

1) Some say that he made a rash vow and later repented (after killing his daughter).

2) Some say that he had been influenced by paganism and was ignorant of Jehovah's will.

3) Some say that it applies to the possibility that animals may have been part of the "whatsoever" that came out to meet him.

4) Some say that it is used figuratively; "whoever comes to meet me will be offered in the manner of a burnt offering"--totally offered to Jehovah.

5) No doubt, other possibilities have been presented.

e. I lean toward the fourth option as the best, but I reject the possibility that Jephthah even considered killing a human being (or a group of people) and then offering this person as a burnt sacrifice. In light of his thoughtfulness, carefulness to present wise solutions to problems, commitment to Jehovah, and his valiance, I do not believe

that he made a rash or repulsive, pagan-like vow here. He (and maybe even his daughter) knew exactly what he was doing and even though the honoring of the vow cost them both dearly, they did so voluntarily out of devotion to Jehovah.

C. The victory (11:32,33).

1. The battle was fought and Jehovah delivered them into his hands (11:32).
2. The victory was great and Ammon was subdued (11:33).

V. HIS VIRGIN DAUGHTER (Judges 11:34-40)

A. The meeting (11:34).

1. In the words of the vow, we are told that she "came out to meet him."
 2. On other occasions, women, not maidens, came out to meet the victors (Exodus 15:20; I Samuel 18:6).
 3. She was his only child.
- B. His reaction (11:35).
1. He acknowledges his vow.
 - a. The wording of his vow demanded something of him and her.

b. There was no way out.

2. He made it clear that his part of his mission was not going to be easy.
 - a. Obedience is better than sacrifice!
 - b. There is no hint that he thought of evading his vow. What a lesson for so many situations today!

C. His understanding (11:36,37).

1. She shows her spirituality--from whom did she learn this (another hint that Jephthah really was what Hebrews 11 claims)?
2. Shows her submission--as Isaac. No thought of evading by her.
3. She went to "bemoan" her virginity (not her death). If she was going to die, why didn't she stay home with her father, to whom she was obviously dedicated?

D. Her commitment (11:38).

1. She carried out her words.
 2. She committed herself to the vow willingly--in spite of its difficulty (Many other faithful people have lived the single, celibate life, too).
3. Women often served at the tabernacle and temple (Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22; Luke 2:36,37).

E. The vow kept (11:39,40).

1. The vow was voluntarily made and voluntarily kept.
2. "Lament": Commemorate, celebrate in songs (Lange).
3. She became a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1,2).

VI. HIS CONFLICT (Judges 12:1-6).

- A. The complaint (12:1).
 - 1. It was from Ephraim (see 8:1; brother of Manasseh).
 - a. Their pride got in the way again and again in the Old Testament.
 - b. It is another warning of the internal dangers that God's people face.
 - 2. It contained a serious threat: "We'll burn your house."
- B. His answer (12:2,3).
 - 1. Where were you when I needed you?
 - 2. He put his life on the line against Ammon, but this was worse--they were his own people.
 - 3. They were rising up against a valiant man.
- C. The resolution of the conflict (12:4-6).
 - 1. The men of Gilead were now strong enough!
 - 2. Ephraim was guilty of causing internal strife by making false accusations.
 - a. We called and you did not come.
 - b. You falsely accuse us of not belonging; but we are not fugitives.
 - 3. Ephraim betrayed themselves by their speech; a common tactic in identifying the enemy in war.
 - a. The meaning of "Shibboleth" (stream, probably) is not the real issue. They were unable to pronounce it with out giving themselves away.
 - b. All of this cost Ephraim dearly, but through the centuries they continued to cause trouble (for example, Jeroboam was of Ephraim). They were a far cry from Joshua, the great leader of Ephraim...

VI. HIS LEGACY (Judges 12:7; Hebrews 11:32,40).

- A. Historical comment (Judges 12:7).
 - 1. His leadership lasted six years.
 - 2. He was buried "at home."
- B. The New Testament application (Hebrews 11:32,40).
 - 1. He is in the list of the faithful.
 - 2. He is one of those who accomplished mighty deeds through faith.
 - 3. He is one of those of whom the world is not worthy.
 - 4. God has provided even "better things" for us through Christ, Will we obtain them through our faith?

CONCLUSION:

- A. Some applications.
 - 1. Jephthah belongs in Hebrews 11!
 - 2. The story is not about a rash vow, but about the power of valiant faith.
 - 3. We must view people and subjects in light of the total context.
 - 4. What love she had for her father!
 - 5. Do you lament because you have no family? Then see Hebrews 11.
 - 6. Be faithful to your word--and careful before you make a vow--and

you will be blessed by Jehovah.

7. Don't think like Ephraim--you cannot reap where you have not sown.

8. Live so that you will have such a legacy as Jephthah.

Invitation.

1. Decide now to be valiant and virtuous before God.

2. Show the Lord your love for Him by obeying His commandments
(John 14:15; 15:14; I John 5:3; Romans 10:17; John 8:24; Acts 17:30;
Romans 10:9,10; Acts 22:16).

Skip Andrews

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