

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 11

- Vv. 1-11 *Jephthah made leader in Gilead.* Jephthah was a mighty man of valour, but he was an outcast from his family since he was born of a harlot. When the Ammonites oppressed the people, they turned in desperation to him to give them the necessary leadership. Since the people had assembled and were looking for a leader as described in chapter ten, it *is* apparent they were in urgent need. The fact that the people chose him and that Jephthah agreed to lead them *is* not as important as the fact that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him (verse 29) .
- Vv. 12-28 *Jephthah's attempt at negotiations.* Jephthah demonstrates rather full knowledge of Israel's past history, and he sent to the king of the children of Ammon to ask what possible reason they had for attacking Israel. He reminded

STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

the Ammonites that the Israelites had lived in the land for three hundred years, and surely they had made clear their claim to the land which was promised to their forefathers. The Ammonites, themselves, were descendants of Lot through his incestuous union with his daughter, and Israel had not attacked them when they came up through the territory under the leadership of Moses. Neither had there been any other time when Israel had shown ill will towards the Ammonites. Jephthah, therefore, asked the Ammonites to leave Israel alone.

Vv. 29-40 *Jephthah's vow*. The notes in Scofield's Bible entitle this section, "Jephthah's awful vow." Such a heading begs the question in regard to the nature of his vow. Did Jephthah have in mind the making of a human sacrifice? Did God grant him a victory knowing that he intended to make a human sacrifice? Did Jephthah actually sacrifice his daughter? The Scripture says, "Jephthah did according to his vow" (verse 39), whatever that was.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *Necessity is the mother of invention*. The men of Gilead would have nothing to do with Jephthah until necessity forced them to such deep distress that they were driven to seek him to be their leader. From being an outcast, he arose to be head over his people. Such is often the case in modern civil and military government. In extreme cases, proud men have been forced to swallow their pride and to do what the necessity of the situation demands.

- 2, *The Judge be judge (verse 27)*, Jephthah felt his case was right in the eyes of God, He pled with the Ammonites to see the verdict of history when he was convinced that the children of Ammon were not fighting a *bellum justum*, Since they were not justified in going to war against Israel, he urged them to drop their military strategy and to leave Israel alone. Armed as Jephthah was with the conviction that God would prove him right, he had a courage that he would not otherwise , have possessed.
- 3, "Pay thy vows unto the most High" (*Psalms 50:14b*). A separate listing of guidelines is given for the performance of vows in Leviticus 27. God did not require the Israelites to make vows; but when they made vows, they were expected to keep them. Jephthah performed his vow—whatever that vow may have been. He had vowed that he would give to God whatever came from his house when he returned after his victorious battle against the Ammonites. All who vow houses, lands, personal properties, talent, or treasure to God should be as careful to fulfill those vows as was Jephthah.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

jefihthab Delivers Israel 11:1-28

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, and he was the son of a harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah,

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.

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.

11:4-14 STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

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

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:

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

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?

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.

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?

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

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.

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?

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 Amon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably.

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

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

16 But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red Sea, and came to Kadesh;

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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

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.

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.

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?

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.

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

1. *Who was Jephthah? 11:1*

Jephthah was the son of a man named Gilead who lived in a territory by the same name. His mother was an *ishah zonah*, a harlot. The same kind of a word is used in the Hebrew language to describe Rahab, who spared the spies in Joshua's day (Joshua 2:1). Since he was of a different mother, his half-brothers drove him out of the land where they lived. There in Gilead he and his followers lived a life of free-booters. At the same time, he is described as a mighty man of valour. This same phrase is used by the angel of the Lord in his address to Gideon (6:12).

2. *Why was Jephthah driven away from his brothers?*

11:2

Jephthah's half-brothers did not want the inheritance of their father to be marred by the claims which might be made to it on the behalf of a son born to a wife of low estate. Abimelech, who was a son of Gideon by a concubine in Shechem, had already brought evil days upon the Israelites; and some of the Israelites may have resented

anyone who was of such parentage, We often see such ostracization of one who is not exactly of the same parentage as the rest of the members of a family. Jealousy arises among members of such families. Some are haughty and feel they are superior to others, Those who are despised are then either forced out of the family circle or they have to avoid the bad treatment they have received.

3. *Where was Jephthah's home? 11:3*

Jephthah went and lived in the land of Tob. Dr. William Smith in *Smith's Bible Dictionary* concludes that Tob was somewhere in Hauran but is unable to give any further identification of the spot. The Hebrew words for "land of Tob" might have been translated as "a good land." In I Maccabees 5:13, we find a reference to the land of Tubias, whence Jews numbering about one thousand men arose and were slain by their enemies. Their wives and children were carried into captivity. Reference is made in later Jewish writings to the land of Tob in such a way as to place it on the plateau east of the Sea of Galilee.

4. *When was Israel attacked by Ammon? 11:4*

The note is made that it came to pass in process of time an attack was made by Ammon on Israel.. This attack was summarized in chapter ten when the children of Israel turned their backs on God and began to serve the Baalim and Ashtaroth. God sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of Ammon. Such vexation had continued over a period of time. Eighteen years of trouble with Ammon were suffered by the children of Israel (10:8).

5. *Why did the elders of Gilead look for Jephthah? 11:5,*

6

The elders of Gilead went to the land of Tob to find Jephthah. He had been driven out from among them by his half-brothers; but when they needed someone to go to

11:9-12 STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

war on their behalf, they recognized Jephthah as being a mighty man of valour. He also had a group of men who are described as vain men (verse 3) . These accompanied him. As the elders of Gilead approached him, they asked him to be their captain. Joshua had men who are called captains of the men of war (Joshua 10:24), and the same word is used in the original text there as in this passage. However, it appears the elders of Gilead really needed someone to be commander-in-chief.

6. What office did Jephthah want to occupy? 11:9

Jephthah did not ask them if he could be their captain; he asked the elders of Gilead if he could be their "head." It is apparent that he wanted to be the ruler—the man in authority. He wanted to be recognized as more than a fighter. He wanted to be considered a leader and accepted in their society. Such a position was occupied by the judges; and since the men of Israel accepted Jephthah as their "head," he has found his place among the judges of Israel.

7. In what way did Jephthah "utter all his words before the Lord?" 11:10, 11

The elders called God to be their witness as they agreed that Jephthah should be their captain and head. Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead upon being assured of their good faith in this matter. The people then made him "head and captain" and at that time it is said that Jephthah "uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh." There must have been some kind of an inauguration of Jephthah. The service was a religious service and corresponds closely to such times as the anointing of Saul (I Samuel 10:1) and David (I Samuel 16:1 ff.) .

8. Why did Jephthah send messengers to the king of Ammon? 11:12

Jephthah did not want to fight the children of Ammon. When the Israelites had come out of Egyptian

bondage, they had been instructed not to attack Moab or Ammon (Deuteronomy 2:9, 19), These people were the descendants of Lot by his incestuous union with his daughters (Genesis 19), and God had instructed the Israelites that the land which had been possessed by the Ammonites and Moabites was not a part of the Promised Land. These people had lived more or less in peace for three hundred years, and Jephthah did not believe they had any just cause for going to war.

9, *What reason did the king of Ammon give for his attack on Israel? 11:13*

The king of the Ammonites told Jephthah's messengers that he was attacking Israel because Israel had taken away his land. He wanted the lands restored again peaceably. The land which is in question is described as being the land which lay between the Amon and Jabbok Rivers on the east side of the Jordan. This was the territory assigned to the tribes of Reuben and Gad by Moses. It was this land which had been settled by these people after they were dismissed from Shiloh in the days of Joshua.

10. *What answer did Jephthah give to the king of Ammon? 11:15-23*

Jephthah showed a very good knowledge of the history of the people of Israel. He reminded the king of Ammon that Israel had not disturbed the territory. They had heeded the warning of the king of Edom and had gone around the territory of the Edomites. At that time, they were also in communication with the king of Moab, and there was no attempt to fight any of these peoples. Sihon, king of the Amorites, had possessed some of this land, Since he blocked Israel's way, he was attacked. The land which he had possessed was then taken by the Israelites. None of this land, however, was in the possession of the Ammonites when the

Israelites came into the area.

11. Whom did Jephthah mention as the god of the Ammonites? 11:24

Evidently the Ammonites had not continued in the fear of Jehovah the God of Israel. Although Lot had accompanied Abraham when he left Ur of the Chaldees, he was separated from Abraham. His separation led him to reside in Sodom and Gomorrah, the wicked cities which God destroyed. Along the way sometime, his descendants had taken up the worship of Chemosh; and Jephthah recognizes that these are not followers of the true and living God.

12. How long did Jephthah say Israel had been in the land? 11:26

Jephthah said that Israel had been there three hundred years. This *is* about the same length of time which is indicated in the chronological notes found in the book of Judges if consideration is given only to the times when the land had rest or the span of time during which a leader judged. The book of Judges was preceded by the forty years wandering in the wilderness and the era of Joshua. Jephthah, himself, is followed by Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson. If the periods of these final judges are added to the time indicated for the preceding judges, the entire span of judges fits well into the chronological note of I Kings 6:1; which says that the temple of Solomon was built four hundred and eighty years after the exodus. Likewise, an equal period of time is indicated by adding the period of wandering to the total length of time of the preceding judges. For these reasons, we feel it is best to regard these judges as ruling successively and the periods of oppression as overlapping with the times which are assigned to the various judges or times when the land had rest.

Jephthah's Vow 11:29-31

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.

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

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.

13. In what way did the Spirit of the Lord come upon Jephthah? 11:29

Jephthah was not only sought by the elders of Gilead, but his position of leadership was attested by his receiving charismatic gifts. He was not only willing to be the captain of the people, but he appears to have been led by the Spirit of the Lord. Since his agreement with the elders had been sworn to and Jephthah had uttered his convictions before the Lord, we view Jephthah as being a man who was guided of God. This does not mean that he was blameless in character. It also does not signify that he had all the gifts which were given to the apostles in the New Testament when they were baptized of the Holy Spirit. It does signify surely that Jephthah was God's man for the time in Israel.

14. What was Jephthah's vow? 11:30, 31

It is most important for the Bible student to dig deeply into the text at this point. Many ramifications of the situation are seen immediately. A question rises in the Bible student's mind as he asks himself if it is possible for a man like Jephthah to have in mind the making of a human

sacrifice. Then consideration must be given to the

possibility of God's giving victory to a man who has such a sordid and cruel concept of sacrifice. The Bible does not say expressly that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter; it simply says that he did with her according to his vow (verse 39). The language of the vow is double in implication. Jephthah says whatever comes out will be the Lord's and he will offer it as a burnt offering. It would be possible for him to offer his daughter in perpetual service to the Lord, and that would be essentially the same as making a burnt offering. If he did have in mind the possibility of his offering a sacrifice, some students of the text indicate the conjunction *and* might be also translated *or*. Then the vow would indicate whatever came out would be the Lord's if it were human; or if it were animal, he would offer it as a burnt offering.

Jephthah's Victory 11:32-40

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

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.

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.

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.

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,

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.

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.

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,

40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

. *Where is Minnith? 11:33*

After Jephthah had beaten the Ammonites he chased them from Aroer a spot east of the Dead Sea all the way to this point which was east of the Jordan River. Mention is made in ancient writings of Mannith which was located as being situated four miles from Heshbon on the road to Philadelphia, which is the modern Amman. The spot identified as the plain of the vineyards has also on occasion been transliterated under the name Abel-chermain. This spot is mentioned as being seven miles from modern Amman, and generally thought of as being in the same direction. Minnith is mentioned in Ezekiel 27:17 as one of the places which traded in the wheat market of Judah with Tyre. The implication of the mentioning of these spots is that Jephthah drove the

Ammonites out of all the land across the Jordan.

16. Why did Jephthah say his daughter had brought him very low? 11:35

Jephthah had vowed to give the Lord the first object belonging to him as soon as he got back to his home. If he did sacrifice his daughter, the fact that he performed such a dastardly deed is reason enough for his saying that he had been brought very low. On the other hand, if he simply dedicated her to perpetual service around the Tabernacle, she would leave him without heirs. She would live a life of perpetual celibacy; and Jephthah, himself, would have no namesake since she was his only child. In any event, he was brought very low.

17. Why did Jephthah's daughter want to be alone for two months? 11:37

If the daughter had devoted herself to death, it is next to incredible that she should have asked to spend the last two months of life granted to her, not with her brokenhearted father, but in the mountains with her companions. She bewails not "her maiden age" but her "maidenhood." She does not bewail that she dies so young, but that she is to live unmarried. It is also impossible to understand why continued repetition should be made of the fact that she knew no man if she were sacrificed. If she continued to live a life of perpetual celibacy such as the women who served around the Tabernacle in the days of Eli (I Samuel 2:22, cf. Exodus 38:8), it would be pertinent to mention that she knew no man.

18. Why did the daughters of Israel assemble yearly in honor of Jephthah's daughter? 11:40

The King James Version gives a translation which indicates that the daughters of Israel went yearly to "lament" the daughter of Jephthah four days each year. The American Standard Version says they went to "celebrate."

Brown, Driver, and Briggs in the *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* define the original

word as coming from *tanah*, which means to recount or rehearse as is indicated in Judges 5;11, where the word also appears, In Young's *Analytical Concordance* the word is found with the meaning of "praise," It is not at all necessary to picture the women of Israel lamenting a person who was offered as a burnt offering. They may *as* well have gone up to praise her or to meet in celebration of her unselfish yielding to her father's vow.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 11

1. Who was Jephthah's father?
2. Where did he live?
3. Against whom did he fight?
4. Had Israel fought against Ammon when Moses led the people into the Promised Land?
5. Who did Jephthah say was the god of Ammon?
6. How long did Jephthah say Israel had been in the Promised Land?
7. Did the Spirit of the Lord come upon Jephthah?
8. Who first met Jephthah when he came back from battle?
9. Did Jephthah refuse to perform his vow?
10. Was the daughter willing for him to perform his vow?

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 12

Vv. 1- 7 *Jephthah's conflict with Ephraim.* The men of Ephraim again found fault with Israel's leader for not giving them a special call. They had earlier chided Gideon for not calling them at the first when he went to war with the Midianites. Gideon appeased their anger by telling them they were much more important than he was and the work which they had finally done

STUDIES IN JOSHUA-JUDGES-RUTH

was more important than his initial victory. In Jephthah's day, actual fighting broke out between Jephthah and the dissatisfied men from the tribe of Ephraim. As a result, forty-two thousand Ephraimites lost their lives.

Vv. 8-10 *Judgeship of Ibzan*. Ibzan was from Bethlehem in the land assigned to the tribe of Zebulun. The home of Ibzan is evidently not in Bethlehem of Judah since later on we find repeated references to the Bethlehem in the South in this form. Elon, who succeeded Ibzan as the judge of Israel, was also from the northern part of the country and is identified with the tribe of Zebulun. The thirty sons of Ibzan evidently married outside their tribe as the Scripture notices.

Vv. 11-12 *The judgeship of Elon*. Elon was from Zebulun. Nothing much is mentioned of him except for his judging Israel. The leadership of the people in itself was a great challenge, and he held this prominent position for ten years.

Vv. 13-15 *The judgeship of Abdon*. The most significant thing about Abdon was his family. He had forty sons and thirty nephews. Each one rode on his own ass colt, indicating their being rather wealthy.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. Say, "*Shibboleth*". Peoples of Christendom are divided on very many issues. Creeds divide people, and so do their shibboleths. The dictionaries define *shibboleth* as "any

criterion, test, or watchword." A shibboleth is a

word or saying which distinguishes the adherence of a party or a sect. This modern usage of the word *shibboleth* has arisen out of its being used originally by the soldiers of Jephthah to test the speech patterns of the men of Ephraim. Thus, a shibboleth is also defined as a given word which distinguishes persons not of a particular nationality or district. It is a peculiarity of speech which is distinctive of a particular class, profession, or set of persons. It is shameful that God's people are divided simply because some do not "talk right." They just don't "sound right" to those who erect their shibboleths.

2. *Pride goeth before a fall.* The men of Ephraim felt they were very prominent in Israel's life. They had not been given a special summons in the days of Gideon, and they chided Gideon for this act which they considered a slight of themselves, In Jephthah's day they had not been called; and when they continued in their stubborn ways, forty-two thousand of them were slain. Every Christian is well advised to take heed when he thinks he stands lest he fall. It is at such a proud moment that Satan's attacks are most vigorous. The fall of a proud Christian *is* even more shameful than the fate of the men of Ephraim.
3. *Opportunity knocks but once.* The men of Ephraim must have known there was a need for a deliverer in the days of Jephthah. The children of Amnion had passed over the Jordan River to fight against Judah, against Benjamin, and against "the house of Ephraim" (10:9). If the men of Ephraim were anxious to play the role of deliverers in Israel, they should have arisen at once to drive out the oppressors. Since the men of Ephraim hesitated and Jephthah arose to lead Israel,

the men of Ephraim were not as significant *as* they had hoped to be. Consequently, these warriors from Ephraim played a rather insignificant role. Eventually, forty-two thousand of them died. How much better would it have been for them to seize the opportunity when first there was the need for deliverance. In just such a manner, Christians today often lose the opportunity to win a victory for God because they do not stand up for their convictions when such courage is most needed.