

Jephthah

Judges 11:1-28

Judges 11:1-28 - *"Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah. ² 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.' ³ 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. ⁴ It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Israel. ⁵ 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. ⁶ Then they said to Jephthah, 'Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon.' ⁷ 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?' ⁸ 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.' ⁹ 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?' ¹⁰ 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.' ¹¹ Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD in Mizpah. ¹² 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?' ¹³ 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.' ¹⁴ So Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, ¹⁵ and said to him, 'Thus says Jephthah: 'Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon; ¹⁶ for when Israel came up from Egypt, they walked through the wilderness as far as the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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.' ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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. ²² They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the*

Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan.

²³ 'And now the LORD God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel; should you then possess it? ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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? ²⁶ 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? ²⁷ 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.' ²⁸ However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him."

Background Notes

After Tola and Jair, God raised up Jephthah as the next judge to deliver his people from the Ammonites. Jephthah is probably best known for his foolish vow in the second half of the chapter, but let's not lose sight of the fact that God used Jephthah in a mighty way to defeat the Ammonites. "*Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor...*" (v1).

Because Jephthah was a son of a prostitute, his brothers despised him and drove him away (v2). So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, northeast of Gilead, towards Damascus. In the land of Tob, Jephthah became a leader of ne'er-do-wells – something like Robin Hood - going out in raiding parties with his band of men. And it wasn't long before the leaders of Gilead came to Jephthah and asked him to return home and lead them against the Ammonites.

Jephthah's own family despised him. His prejudiced brothers forced him out of his home, even though he hadn't done anything wrong. This is similar to the treatment the people of Israel gave our Lord Jesus. Our Lord was rejected and despised and cast out by His own people, even though He had done nothing wrong. And do you remember the scandal surrounding His miraculous virgin birth? His enemies even accused our Lord of an illegitimate birth. Jephthah used skill and knowledge when he confronted the Ammonite king, and Jesus astonished His listeners by the words He spoke, and what He taught. And just as the leaders of Israel in Jephthah's day were humbled to the point where they asked Jephthah to return and rule over them, so the nation of Israel will eventually be humbled. Every knee will bow, and they will be forced to recognize Jesus Christ as King.

So in spite of the many human flaws of the judges, I think that in some of them we can catch tiny glimpses or spiritual pictures of the perfect Judge - the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Doctrinal Points

1. Great potential can be lost because of prejudice.

Jephthah was definitely a man of great potential. He was a mighty man of valor (v1).. The fact that he was able to take a group of worthless men and unite them into an organized fighting unit shows us that Jephthah had great leadership ability.

Jephthah was a godly person (v9-11). He was ready to give the Lord credit for any victory. In addition, “*Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD in Mizpah*” (v11). And when Jephthah addressed the Ammonites, he showed great diplomatic skill in the way he used his extensive knowledge of history and logic.

So even though Jephthah made some mistakes, as we’ll see, he was a man of great potential. But - and here’s the main point - his great potential was almost lost because of the prejudice of his brothers. Jephthah hadn’t done anything wrong, but his brothers despised him and forced him to flee – all because they didn’t have the same mother. What prejudice!

There’s a lesson for us here. I wonder how much potential for the Lord is being lost because of the prejudice of Christian brothers and sisters against someone God is raising up? For example: “That man can’t preach or teach here because he hasn’t been to seminary.” Or how about this example: “Those people don’t have the truth like we do, because they’re not in our denomination. Therefore what they say doesn’t carry a lot of weight. Don’t welcome them into our church. Let them go to church somewhere else....”

Let’s not allow prejudice to blind us as to what God wants to do in the lives of others. Great potential can be lost because of prejudice.

2. God honors the truth, not "spin."

You know what “spin” is, right? “Spin” is when someone takes the facts and manipulates them to suit themselves, and to push their own agenda. “Spin” is not the whole truth. “Spin” usually leaves out important parts of the truth for the purposes of the person who is doing the “spinning.”

God honors the truth – and He doesn’t honor “spin”! We certainly see that lesson taught here. Notice the “spin” that the king of Ammon put on the facts: “*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”* (v13). Now it sounds like the king of Ammon is telling the truth, doesn’t it? It sounds like Israel should give the land back, right? Wrong!! It was not truth – it was “spin.”

Jephthah gave the truth in verses 14-28. “*Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon...*” (v15). Then Jephthah proceeded to tell the true historical facts, of how Israel went around Edom and Moab when they were about to enter the Promised Land. When they came to the land that was now being disputed by the king of Ammon, it was already in the possession of the Amorites under King Sihon. So Israel didn’t take the land from the Ammonites, but from the Amorites - and they fought only when the Amorites attacked Israel! Israel was willing to pass

through their midst and cross the Jordan River without a fight, but the Amorites attacked them and God gave the victory and the land to Israel.

So Jephthah said: *“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”* (v27). And the Lord did render judgment. God honored the truth spoken by Jephthah, not the spin given out by the Ammonites. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah (v29), and he delivered Israel from the oppression of the Ammonites.

God always honors the truth. He doesn't honor “spin.” Those who are getting away with spin right now will ultimately have to answer to the Lord in the light of the truth. Whether in politics or in Christian circles, ultimately it will all come out in the wash, and “spin-meisters” will answer for their distortion of the truth.

God honors the truth, not “spin”!

Practical Application

Do you suffer as a result of someone else's mistakes?

Jephthah was the son of a prostitute, and because of that he had to flee and live like an outcast. But that was not Jephthah's fault. The situation of his birth was someone else's mistake. So what was Jephthah's reaction to all this? He never took revenge, even though he could have. Furthermore, he honored the Lord and made himself available for the Lord's service.

What is our reaction when we suffer as a result of someone else's mistakes? Do we take revenge? Or do we leave the situation in God's hands and make ourselves available for the His service? Romans 12:19 says *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”*

Remember Jephthah when you suffer as a result of someone else's mistakes.