

Judges 11-12

Well... turn with me to Judges 11 and as you do... let's take a look back a few weeks ago at what happened at the end of Chapter 10.

We saw how the the '**sin cycle**' reared it's ugly head once again.

And you have wonder how can this be? *How can the Israelites continue in this cycle over and over and over?*

But here we are again, God's people getting very comfortable, complacent or content *and then sin comes.*

Pastor Brent reminded us, *when we aren't seeking the Lord like we once were,* we can begin to drift or, broaden are path without even realizing the harm. When things are going well, it's easy to let our guard down and become enticed by other things.

In chapter 10 we see once again... *the people forsaking the Lord to entertain numerous idols.*

In fact Seven different gods are listed.

Church, this is why God allows difficulties or trials in our lives. They keep us grounded and focussed on Him. They keep us in that place of dependency on the Lord .

Pastor Brent explained that Anything else, *only brings us into bondage and oppression, which leads to **depression.***

That's what we read in vs. 9, that they were **severely distressed.**

In Chapter 10-14 - And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, "We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!" 11 So the Lord said to the children of Israel, "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines? 12 Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand. 13 Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. 14 Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress."

How many times has God been through this with them, this '***cycle of sin***'? He simply says, "*If they want to serve these other gods so much, then they should look to them for their help.* **Great Answer!**

But as Pastor Brent said, we learn something of the persistence of seeking the Lord and walking in humility and obedience to Him.

It says in verses,

15-16 - *And the children of Israel said to the Lord, "We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray."* 16 *So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.*

Israel has once again repented, but this time it was repentance accompanied with action. True repentance should always be accompanied with action otherwise it's not repentance.

It's here that we see the ***incredible mercy of God*** as *He sees His people crying out to Him and taking action.* He can no longer leave them in that place of bearing His judgment. He relents and comes to their aid once again. **What an awesome God!**

At the close of Judges chapter 10 we we end with the following two verses:

10:17-18 - *Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled together and encamped in Mizpah. 18 And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, "Who is the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."*

The people of Gilead are in desperate need a leader... someone who can begin the battle against the Ammonites... and this is where we pick up tonight in chapter 11. We're about to see how the next Judge of Israel was chosen *and as we will see, he is a seemingly an unlikely character.*

Let's pray

11 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah.

This is one of the many ways you can know the Bible is true.

It doesn't try to hide the biblical characters *past* or their *reputations*, or as we will see before the end of tonight's message, their *very bad decisions*.

In this first verse we have a perfect example of that kind of truth in Jephthah, *although he was a mighty man of valour*, he was born out side of marriage and he was the son of a harlot, *a prostitute, which was a terrible social stigma in that day*.

Do you know what today's terrible social stigma is, it's an evangelical Christian who loves Jesus, and Israel, and believes in the sanctity of life and marriage and would have voted for Trump if possible.

Apparently being caucasian doesn't help either...

Well, okay, it's not that bad yet! but I hope you get the point...

Jephthah would have grown up being the butt of many jokes, being teased and taunted, even by his own family, *with no one believing he would grow up to amount to anything*, let alone be a leader and a hero of the faith.

But... where do we find his name written in the New Testament? *The book of Hebrews chapter 11*. He is recorded in all of history as one of the giants of the faith, *one of the heroes of God's people*.

Well, when you read through Hebrews 11 you realize that God loves to use the most unlikely, *most unqualified people to accomplish His will*.

Although not all of these men are listed in the hall of faith, let's just look at a few examples of how the unlikely, and unqualified have been used by God. These men failed and yet were still used by God for His great purposes.

First up is **Abraham** - He tried to make God's promise come true by having a child through Sarah's maidservant.... and this was after he was called by God and ordained to be the father of the faith. He also wavered when, *fearing Pharaoh*, he lied not once, but twice about his wife in order to save his own skin.

Look at **Moses** - After he was called into ministry, he killed a man, buried him in the sand and then fled to the desert to save his own life.

Then there's **Jonah** - He was proud, stubborn, disobedient, unfaithful, a grumbler, and altogether a bad-tempered, cantankerous old curmudgeon— whose name means “dove”! He was called by God to warn the Ninevites of their impending doom and to usher in the world's greatest revival, but instead he fled to Joppa and got on a ship bound for Tarshish, which was in the opposite direction from Nineveh.

Even after the big fish incident, when the Ninevites did turn to God in revival, this proud, stubborn, disobedient, unfaithful grumbler wished the Ninevites had been blasted, rather than blessed.

And what about the New Testament:

Peter - Remember, that Peter spent three years with Jesus, watching His miracles, hearing His teachings, sharing meals with Him, in constant discussion with Him, He even rightly answered Jesus, when he said, “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**”

But when he was at the fire of the enemy, *He denied ever knowing Jesus.*

What about **Paul**: Here was a cruel and callous man who was barbaric and brutal in how he dealt with christians, so much so, *that even after he did get saved*, the early church refused to believe it.

Even **John Mark**: After achieving a call to the missions field he got homesick and high-tailed it back home.

All these men struggled and it's the same for all people who surrender their life to Jesus.

Isaiah 51:1 says, “**Listen to Me**, you who follow after righteousness, You who **seek the LORD**: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, And to the hole of the pit from which you were dug.

What is meant here?

In this verse the LORD speaks to His people, but His people *have had trouble listening to Him*. (sound familiar)

Church, God counsels His people to look at the work He has done through those, *that He dug out of the 'hole of the pit' in the past*, and as **we** do, we'll discover that this is one of the great glories of God's Word to us in our day;

Think back to what was said a few minutes ago about men like Abraham - Moses - Jonah - Peter - Paul - John Mark..

*Looking back at the failures of the great men of God... shows us how God has dealt with His people in the past, people who have experienced failure, and it gives us *faith* and *guidance* and *hope* for His work in our lives moving forward— ***if we will listen to Him.****

Knowing this, also allows me and you to move on, *I can say, you can say, “Lord, in spite of my failures I can still move forward according to Your grace, Your mercy, and Your love.*

It's been said,

“Once a Christian gets eaten up with discouragement and unbelief it takes a great deal to shake him out of it. Those two emotions are the masterstrokes of Satan. So long as the child of God maintains an attitude of praise and trust in the Lord, then he is invincible. Once the devil gets him discouraged, that poor man is really going to take a knocking!” (Redpath)

So the next time we come across someone who has failed or fallen, let's not be those who come down on them, let's be those who remember that we too have failed at times, and will again in the future, so feel free to reach out in love to them.

Who knows, the next guy we come across, who seems like a lost cause, might just be the next Jephthah in a future move of God.

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.”

Through no fault of his own, what should have been a nice, loving, nurturing, and caring family, turned on him and drove him out of the family, So it's no wonder - as we'll come to find out - that he over compensated by becoming the toughest kid on the block.

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.

First, I'd like to explain where the land of Tob was located, and I should have had a map to show you, but I can only offer the following explanation by a man named (Cundall)

"Tob has been tentatively identified with the modern el-Taiyibeh, about 15 miles east-north-east of Ramoth-gilead, in the desolate area which lay just outside the eastern boundary of Israel and the northern frontier of Ammon."

Got It! I'm sure that helps clear up just exactly where Tob was located, right?

What I can also tell you that Tob was an area known for it's marauders and murderers, it's raiders and robbers.

So, is that the kind of people Jephthah connected with, and is that the kind of man he became?

Well, some people, smarter than me, (actually, that's a lot of you who are sitting here in this room), believe the following:

Jephthah wasn't necessarily the leader of a band of criminals.

(Adam Clarke) explains... that the term **worthless men** doesn't necessarily mean a bandit: "The word may, however, mean in this place *poor persons*, without property, and without employment."

(Wood) had this to say, "He and his band probably operated more in the manner of David and his group years later, protecting cities and settlements from marauders." David did this in the period described in 1 Samuel 25:4-8, receiving pay from those whom they helped. It is also possible that they only plundered the villages of enemy peoples, such as the Ammonites.

So, maybe Jephthah was more 'Robin Hood', than a leader of ruthless criminals, like the 'Tob Mob', and this will make a little more sense to us as we read further into this chapter.

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."

So just who were the Ammonites?

They were a semi-nomadic group of *pagan* people who worshipped the gods of Milcom and Molech and were descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot. They lived in the territory of modern-day Jordan.

So, *when the Ammonites declared war against Israel*, it seems the elders of Gilead were shaking in their sandals and needed someone to be their leader. Who do they think of, *the toughest guy they knew*, Jephthah.

Now, *remember* that Jephthah was humiliated and rejected by his family *because of who his mother was*, and now the elders of Gilead, *some who appear to be half brothers*, based on the following verse, are coming to him, begging him to risk his life to save the people of their land.

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?"

Fair question... **(Trapp) said**, *"May not God justly say as much to most of us? We seldom seek to him till needs must."*

*This can certainly be true for us, as long as things are going well in our lives, we give thanks during most meals, and spend a few minutes in His 'Throne Room' after some devotion time, until, well, things aren't going the way we planned them, and we' become like the elders of Gilead... **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?"

Now Jephthah's no dummy...

He's see's an opportunity to redeem himself by requiring a position of a leadership, *to become a Judge*, where he can't be rejected again as worthless, *and he believes the elders are just desperate enough to agree to his terms.*

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.

It's interesting to think about what the half brothers might have been thinking when the realization hit, *that Jephthah*, the one who they cast out of the family, *is now going to be in charge over them.*

Would there be retribution for what they had done to him? *It seems it would be fitting for Jephthah to give them some pay back!*

Church, can you think of another person from the Old Testament who had a similar experience? Yes *Joseph*, what an incredible story that is. Joseph certainly had good reason to get back at his brothers for how they treated him, but did he? No, *he extended God's grace and mercy.*

Church, In both these stories we see that God always has a great way of overcoming injustice, of righting a wrong for His purposes, *which by the way*, He's still doing in our day.

So the next time you feel you've been wronged, *and you're looking for away to get even*, what should you do?

Scheme and plan to get even! No, 'Choose the Jesus Way', *That's also a great Phil Wickham song, which I almost started singing!*

Church, so what's the 'Jesus Way'? Choose to forgive the person and let God work it out on your behalf, Trust me, *He'll do a much more perfect work!*

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.”

So I think we have to give this *rebel* Jephthah some credit here. *He doesn't react to this declaration of war by the Ammonites, by storming into the battle, no, he chooses to try and negotiate peace, by using diplomacy and asking a reasonable question, "What do you have against me that you have come to fight against me in my land?"*

So the King of Ammon replies to Jephthah's messengers with... we were here before you ever thought of being here. We lived here before you did, and you came and took the land away from us and we want it back, preferably peacefully, but if not, through war!

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.

So when Israel *politely* asked Sihon the king of the Ammorites and Heshbon, to let them pass through their land, Sihon, for some reason, didn't trust Israel and refused them passage and then rallied his army and launched an offensive attack against Israel, ***but God was with Israel***, and when Sihon's men went down in defeat, the land became Israel's.

These verses remind us of what we're seeing in the Middle East today, *regarding ongoing conflict against Israel.*

There are seven different Jihadist proxies of Arab nations... attacking Israel and *claiming that Israel has stolen their land.*

Church, *Israel is not the occupier of the land, this has always been their land, ever since it was established by God through Abraham. Isaac and Jacob.*

And it's not just the Arab's believing this lie, *it's people and countries all over the world.*

Listen to what France's President Macron said, ***"Prime Minister Netanyahu must remember, that Israel was established through a United Nations resolution."***

Amir Tsarfati's response on Telegram was, ***"And I say to this French macaroon: Israel was established by God's decree!"***
Amen to that!

Also to note: Not to beat up on just Emmanuel Macron... **but he banned all Israeli defense companies from the Euronaval Defence Expo in Paris, which is occurring as we speak.**

(In other words **JEWIS NOT ALLOWED**). Of course, *Jihadists are welcome, as always, responded Amir Tsarfati*

Now getting back to verses we just read, the subject of quarrel was a claim of the right to the land put forward by the Ammonite King which the Israelites were accused of occupying. *In his response, Jephthah's reply was clear, decisive, and really... unanswerable;* — first... those lands were not in the possession of the Ammonites when his countrymen got them... the reality is, *they had been acquired by right of conquest from the Amorites.*

Jephthah reminded the King of the Ammonites that it was the Amorites who conquered him and his army and took control of the land. So when Israel defeated the Amorites in battle, they rightly took the land of the Amorites - *which also happened to be the previous land of the Ammonites.*

Israel only went to war against the Amorites, *because of the vicious Amorite war against Israeli civilians, which we have seen occur in our day by remembering the recent unprovoked horrific attack by Hamas, a proxy of Iran, on October 7th of last year... against the people of Israel.*

Church, Israel always has the right to defend itself, *when attacked!*

What the Jihadist Arab world needs to realize, is that they're not just fighting the Israeli people, they're trying to do battle against the **God of Israel**, and *that will never ever workout well for them.*

Benjamin Netanyahu has rightly said, "If the Arabs put down their weapons today, there would be no more violence. If the Jews put down their weapons today, ***there would be no more Israel.***"

That is a fact! Jephthah continues to explain.

23 'And now the Lord God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel; should you then possess it?

Jephthah continues to explain... that since God gave this land to Israel, the Ammonites had no claim over it, *and now he gets a little more aggressive and really starts laying out the truth.*

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.' ”

Jephthah really lays it out here in his written response to the King of the Ammonites.

He argued that the Ammonite god Chemosh must show himself worthy to conquer the land of Israel. Since Israel held this land **for three hundred years**, it demonstrated that Chemosh was not greater than the God of Israel.

So who is this god Chemosh?

Chemosh was the god of the Moabites ([Numbers 21:29](#); [Jeremiah 48:7, 13, 46](#)). Scripture calls him “the abomination of Moab” ([1 Kings 11:7](#)).

Sadly, Chemosh was one of those gods worshiped by Solomon's wives and King Solomon allowed Chemosh-worship into Israelite culture.

The false god Chemosh was associated with the goddess Ashteroth, another false god worshiped by wayward Israelites. In fact Chemosh may have been the same deity as the Ammonite god Moloch ([1 Kings 11:7](#), [33](#)).

I could go on, but here's the reality. Satan is behind all false God's and as powerful as Satan is. He cowers at the mention of the one true God. AMEN!

So Jephthah has put forth an inherent challenge: Remember what he said in verse 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. If your god is mighty enough to give you the land, then let him do it. **Let us see who is stronger - Yahweh or Chemosh.***"

Jephthah knew this battle wasn't *just* between two armies, it was between the **God of Israel** and the false god of Ammon.

He showed real wisdom in seeing this as a spiritual battle first and he knew that Yahweh would deliver the Ammonites into their hands if it was His will, *and as for Chemosh he knew (Satan) could do nothing about it.*

28 However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him.

It would seem that the King of Ammon was not impressed with Jephthah's arguments and was convinced that '*might*' was on his side.

When we consider the enemies of Israel in our day... *we see that same response. The Arabs, those who hate the Jewish people, and keep in mind that, not all Arabs hate the Jewish people, will not heed a logical, reasoned response from Israel, and cannot comprehend that their false god, *can't win a war against the God of Israel.**

So this is where the story becomes a battleground.

29 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.

Remember where Jephthah came from. He was an *illegitimate son of a harlot*, a hoodlum and a marauder and yet **God said to him**, "You're my man, Jephthah. You're the one for the job."

The Spirit of the Lord has come upon Jephthah and was the source of Jephthah's courage as he leads his men into battle.

Church, the Holy Spirit can be the source of courage for us as well. When we're filled with fears, doubt and anxieties, we need to turn to Jesus and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Listen to what Jon Courson had to say regarding the 'Spirit of the Lord'.

Today, sad to say, many don't understand the New Covenant. Our Trinity is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Bible. We've lost touch with how the Holy Spirit speaks to us moment by moment because we've replaced His voice with the written Word. Many churches, and organizations study the Bible and are right in their theology - but they're dead right because theirs is knowledge for knowledge's sake. The New Testament was never intended to be an esoteric, intellectual, theological trip for people who like to fill notebooks, answer questions, and work on workbooks. That was never the intent of the New Testament writer.

What was the intent? To provide a way believers could be confirmed or corrected in what they were already living out as a result of obeying the still, small voice of the Spirit.

The person who's really used by the Lord... is one who simply says, 'You're going to tell me moment by moment what I should do, and, Lord, I will just say Yes to whatever You say.'

What a great reminder of how we're to live our lives.

The Holy Spirit doesn't overwhelm and control us... Church what does He do? He guides us - and that guidance can either be *resisted or ignored*, during whatever challenge we face.

That said, be aware and remember, that even a Spirit-filled man can still do foolish things *and here it comes*.

30 And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, “If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, 31 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.”

Yep! here it is, the ‘**vow verse**’ that has many prominent Bible scholars in disagreement.

Let’s read verse 31 again....

31 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.”

We will come back to this verse in a moment because a lot hinges on a single word change, that many scholars have struggled with.

It appears that Jephthah’s desire to defeat the Ammonites was so intense that he made a special “vow to the Lord. ” Now I’m sure this was well intentioned, **but this turned out to be a very foolish vow.**

Church, it seems this was truly an act of devotion on Jephthah’s part, *but in reality it showed a lack of faith in God’s enabling power.* If God has called you to something, *you don’t need to make vows in order to try and obligate Him to deliver the result we desire.*

Listen to this quote by Meyer: *“There is no need to bribe God’s help, as Jephthah did, by his rash promise. He will give gladly and freely out of His own heart of love the help and deliverance we need, if only our course is rightly ordered before Him.”* (Meyer)

Church, *remember,* It is far more important to be on God’s side, than to try and persuade Him to be on your side.

32 So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the Lord delivered them into his hands. 33 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.

Here we have yet another victory for Israel, won under the leadership of an illegitimate son of a harlot, a hoodlum and a marauder and, a Holy Spirit-filled judge.

Note this: It was **God Who won a great and important victory** for Israel through Jephthah. To Jephthah's credit, he overcame bitterness and family rejection to meet a very important and great need and despite his difficult past, God still wonderfully used him, and continues to use people like Jephthah in our day.

Perhaps the now the latest 'President Elect... Donald Trump' is such a man.

34 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. 35 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."

Oh Oh!

Here he is coming home as a victorious **warrior and judge** of the people, a *hero*, perhaps not even thinking about his vow... *when suddenly the door opens and there is his only child...* rushing out the door to greet him with timbrels and dancing! *What a wonderful sight to see as you return home from battle... or at least it should have been!*

The '**vow**' must have hit him like a brick, as it came rushing back to his mind and shattered that incredible moment of joy, *and left him devastated.*

What was he thinking anyway, *when he made his vow?*

Shouldn't he of thought about the possibility that it could be his daughter, his only child, to be the first thing to come out of the doors of his house?

I'm trying to cut him some slack for making such a foolish vow!

I wonder in my mind if maybe she had moved out of the house... or he knew she was away visiting family, or going to some type of school, away from home?

It was one thing to make and keep the vow when Jephthah believed that a cow or a sheep or a goat would come out of the house when he got home; but when it was his daughter who came out, he should have immediately dropped to his knees and said, “*Lord, I’m wrong to have made such a foolish vow... and it would be more sinful for me to keep it than to break it. Please Lord forgive me, because I can’t sacrifice my only child.*” **But did he?**

I came across this comment in David Guzik’s Commentary.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 and 5:4-6 speak of the danger of making foolish vows. This passage makes it clear that it is better to not make vows at all than to make foolish vows. This does not mean that vows are bad - they can be good. It means we must take them seriously. Christians need to take seriously the sin of broken vows, and when we see them we must either repent and keep them or repent of the foolishness in ever making the vow, and seek God’s release from the vow.

Many want to believe that Jephthah did not sacrifice his only child and we’re going to look into this a little bit to see if this outcome was possible.

Many Bible scholars like Adam Clarke... J.Vernon Magee and a whole host of others, *believe*, that Jephthah did not sacrifice his daughter, why? because they believe the following: *that according to the most accurate Hebrew scholars, the best scriptural translation is, I will consecrate it to the LORD, **or** I will offer it for a burnt-offering.* They have removed the word ‘and’ & replaced it with the word ‘or’.

So is this true, well, the King James Version gives the word “or” as an option, exchanging the word ‘and’ for ‘or’ totally changes how the verse reads and allows for her to be spared from a sacrifice of death.

On the other hand, other scholars would argue that the word ‘or’ has never been substituted for ‘and’ anywhere else in scripture.

Confusing isn’t it?

At the same time, there was something wonderful about the spirit of Jephthah’s willingness to keep his vow, even when it would cost him dearly.

Yes, *his vow was foolish*, and either way he shouldn’t have kept it, but he demonstrates great character when he says, “**I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it**”.

Church,

That should be the attitude of every follower of Jesus Christ.

Think this through,

As followers of Jesus Christ, Jephthah's statement reminds us of *what we have done*: *Look at the ways we have given our word.*

- We have confessed our faith in Jesus Christ.
- We have declared ourselves as followers and disciples of Jesus Christ.
- We have praised God with our songs and words.
- We have proclaimed our part together with God's people.

As followers of Jesus Christ... *like Jephthah's statement...* when he said **"I cannot go back on it"**.... It reminds us of *what we cannot do*:

- We cannot go back for the sake of being persecuted.
- We cannot go back for the sake of being mocked.
- We cannot go back, even a little ways.
- To go back would show that our faith was a lie... *we were never saved!*
- To go back would disgrace the work of Jesus on the cross.
- To go back would forsake our heavenly reward.
- To go back would make no sense.
- Go back to what? Unbelief? ***That's crazy!!!***

So, we know that Jephthah kept his vow! One way or the other, and we'd like to think that he didn't sacrifice her but we'll get back to that in a minute.

Now, as we read the next few verses, *here is something that I find almost impossible to understand, especially in our day.*

Listen to his daughters response.

36 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." 37 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."

This once again adds to the struggle of whether or not Jephthah sacrificed his only child. Can you imagine in our day... telling your daughter, you're only child, that you unintentionally had made a vow to the Lord to sacrifice her, and that you're going to have to go through with it, and your daughter calmly responds...

"Sure, OK Dad, you gave your word to the Lord and you're a man of integrity and I get it, so do what you have to do, but I need you to let me spend two months with my friends to express my great disappointment, that I will never have known a man."

Would she respond this way knowing she was going to be sacrificed to death?

This is incredible to me, the only other time I remember seeing this kind of faith, was when Isaac was also facing death through 'sacrifice by father', way back in Genesis 22.

Isaac was bound willingly and placed on the altar by his father Abraham.

In that case the Lord intervened and stopped Abraham from going through with it because God abhors human sacrifice.

I think this demonstrates incredible faith on the part of both of these children towards, not only their earthly fathers, but to the Lord our God, our heavenly Father!

*May we and our children have such great faith!
But let's not commit to foolish vows!*

38 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. 39 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.

So this is the dilemma we have before us:

Did Jephthah actually sacrifice his daughter? or, did he set his daughter aside for tabernacle service?

Many scholars believe that it is more likely that Jephthah set his daughter aside for tabernacle service, according to the principle of [Leviticus 27:2-4](#), where persons, set apart to God in a vow, *were not required to be sacrificed* (as animals were) but were “given” to the tabernacle in monetary value.

We know that there were women who were set apart for the tabernacle service; they were called ***the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting*** ([Exodus 38:8](#); [1 Samuel 2:22](#)).

Is it possible that Jephthah’s daughter became one of these women who served at the tabernacle of meeting?

Now, *if this is the truth of what happened, it was still a very difficult decision for Jephthah and his daughter*, but I think it’s much more palatable for our minds than an actual sacrifice, especially when we read Jephthah’s name in Hebrews 11 as a hero of the faith.

But many commentators object, and see no other option than to say that Jephthah, *horribly fulfilled his vow, by the human sacrifice of his own daughter*.

“The attempt to commute the sentence of death to one of perpetual virginity cannot be sustained.” (Cundall)

So what is it? Was she committed to temple service or sacrificed?

If her fate was to be committed to temple service, then how does this last verse fit in with that assumption?

and it became a custom in Israel 40 that the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Church, does it make sense that it would become a ‘**custom**’ for the daughters of Israel to spend four days each year to **lament** Jephthah’s daughter, *if she was serving in ministry at the sanctuary?*

*To me it seems more likely, that this level of ‘**grief and sorrow**’ to become an annual four day commemoration, only makes sense, if she died at the hands of her father?*

And this is again, one of the reasons many scholars believe she was sacrificed.

OK, We've solved nothing. There are many more excellent arguments to support both sides of the discussion regarding which outcome is correct, but we don't have time to go through them tonight, *because Pastor Brent says, we still have to get through chapter 12 tonight.*

So after much reading, pondering, more reading, discussions with other pastors and listening to other brilliant men's opinions, it appears I will not be able confirm or deny what actually happened to Jephthah's only child.

So, how do we leave this?

Well one last thought to ponder:

Human sacrifice was strictly forbidden by God. So if Jephthah did it, he did it of his own free will, *not because God demanded it.* It is a very horrible thing and it's is hard for us to understand and we certainly can't blame God.

But maybe you've had this thought, "Why did God allow her to come out of the house first? Why didn't she chase the cat out in front of her?" ***I don't have an answer for that.***

But I do want to say this, King David, Moses and Saul or (Paul) were all responsible for taking another persons life, and yet God used them in powerful and very effective ways.

Even if Jephthah did sacrifice his daughter, God still honoured him for his faith and commitment, *and if you're a believer and your hearing this message and you've failed God in some major way,* don't lose heart, because Jesus died for your sins, He paid the penalty that you couldn't pay and God can use you just as He did Jephthah and David and Moses and Paul to do great things.

Judges Chapter 12

So here in chapter 12 we once again come across the chronic complainers. And this isn't the first time this proud and powerful tribe of Ephraim felt slighted by one of Israel's Judges. Remember in Judges 8, they called out Gideon for not inviting them to participate in the victory of Midian. To his credit...Gideon was very wise and diplomatic, *he didn't challenge their pride,* instead, he complimented them and gave them the recognition they seemed to crave and that soothed their ego's.

But listen to what happens when the men of Ephraim challenge Jephthah.

12 Then the men of Ephraim gathered together, crossed over toward Zaphon, and said to Jephthah, “Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you with fire!”

Whoa! That’s a bit harsh!

The men of Ephraim were used to dealing with the diplomatic Gideon of the past, but now they’re dealing with, and threatening, *with violence, a very different sort of man, with a very different response.*

They told Jephthah, **“We will burn your house down on you with fire”**:

Well listen to Jephthah’s response.

2 And Jephthah said to them, “My people and I were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon; and when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands. 3 So when I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the people of Ammon; and the Lord delivered them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?”

Jephthah’s not troubled by their threat and states the facts, **When I called you, you did not deliver me**: When I called, you chronic complainers had a chance to step out boldly for God, but you didn’t do it.

Yet, when the work was done and God was glorified, you whined and complained that you didn’t get to participate.

God won a great victory through Jephthah, while the Ephraimites stood by, even though they had the opportunity to help, and he pointed out how ridiculous their complaint was.

So unlike the diplomat Gideon, the tough fighter from Tob, said, *“If that’s the way you want to play this, then the fight is on!”*

4 Now Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, “You Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites.” 5 The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan

before the Ephraimites arrived. And when any Ephraimite who escaped said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," then they would say to him, "Then say, 'Shibboleth!'" And he would say, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it right. Then they would take him and kill him at the fords of the Jordan. There fell at that time forty-two thousand Ephraimites.

So it seems pretty clear that the men of Ephraim were better at talking than they were at fighting, because the men of Gilead seemed to conquer them without a lot of effort.

Heading home in defeat, the Ephraimites were met by the Gileadites, who had reached the Jordan before them and had taken control of the crossing points of the Jordan river.

When any Ephraimite who escaped said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," then they would give them a test.

Church, these next few verses bring out an interesting understanding of how our way of speaking, can tell others a lot about us.

What was the test?

If the Ephraimite said 'no' to the Gileadites question, then they would tell him to say the word for 'Flowing Stream', and that word was 'Shibboleth':

With this one word the people from the tribe of Ephraim were easily identified by their dialect. They had a really hard time pronouncing the "h" in **Shibboleth** and said *Sibboleth* instead.

This one word, was very telling and would cost 42,000 of them their lives.

According to Herbert Wolf, it is said that during the Second World War, the German soldiers sometimes identified Russian Jews by the way they pronounced the word for corn: "*kookoorooza*." Their distinctive pronunciation revealed their ethnic background.

(Cundall) said. So it was for these men of Ephraim. "The Ephraimites were betrayed by their speech; so was Peter many years afterward"

Remember in (Matthew 26:73-75) when Peter had followed Jesus and was sitting in the outer courtyard pretending he didn't know Jesus... in vs 74 it says, And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you." Then he began to curse and swear, *saying*, "I do not know the Man!"

And then what happened Church, Immediately a rooster crowed. **75** And Peter remembered the words of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

Church, are there certain true shibboleths in our everyday vocabulary?, I believe there is.

Today when someone talks about Jesus, *you can listen to what they say and learn something about them.*

You can listen as they talk about the Bible, *and you learn something about them.* It's also true that as much as our dialect gives us away, so does our everyday speech.

The truth is, others should be able to tell that we're Christians by the way we talk. Would you agree?

Well, we're running out of time so I'm going to move quickly through these last few verses.

7 And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried among the cities of Gilead.

8 After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. 9 He had thirty sons. And he gave away thirty daughters in marriage, and brought in thirty daughters from elsewhere for his sons. He judged Israel seven years. 10 Then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem.

Ibzan practiced the traditional custom of making alliances through marriage and was wealthy and prestigious enough to have so many children and so many alliances through marriage.

Unfortunately, this verse doesn't say that the Spirit of God came upon him or that he did anything particularly noteworthy. *It seems he was too busy with his family as his priority to be of any use to God as a Judge of Israel.*

Too bad he didn't know Matthew 6:33 which says, **But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.**

11 After him, Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel. He judged Israel ten years. 12 And Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.

Elon (*not the Musk kind*) was next in a succession of briefly-reigning judges. He was from a different tribe from the past few judges before him, because God called leaders from various tribes, instead of from one tribe only.

13 After him, Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel. 14 He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy young donkeys. He judged Israel eight years. 15 Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mountains of the Amalekites.