

Week #:	205	Series:	God's Judgment	Title:	Judge #8 - Jephtha
Scriptures:	Judges 10:17 - 11:28				
Songs:	Stones – Kim Walker Smith (6:49)				
	Nobody Loves Me Like You – Chris Tomlin (4:27)				
	Prayer	Too Good to Not Believe – Brandon Lake (9:59)			
Videos:	Judges Song – What's in the Bible #4 (Time- 31:31-33:25)				

## Judge #8: Jephtha

The first seven judges in our study have been:

1. Othniel: He was Caleb's nephew. Israel lived in peace after him for 40 years.
2. Ehud: He was known for the physical feature of being left-handed. Israel lived in peace after him for 80 years.
3. Shamgar: He was known for killing 600 Philistines with a farm tool, an oxgoad.
4. Deborah: She was a female prophetess, whom God used to free the people from Jabin [Yavin], King of Hazor, and his commander Sisera.
5. Gideon: Called God's valiant hero. Israel lived in peace for 40 years, until he died.
6. Tola: Lived in Shamir and judges Israel for 23 years
7. Jair: Had 30 sons who governed 30 cities; judges Israel for 22 years

Our last lesson on the judges was the first of a three chapter series on the exploits of a fellow named Jephtha. The 5 minor Judges lived either before or even possibly during the same time as Jephtha, and Jephtha's era of operation is actually towards the end of the almost 4 centuries period called the time of the Judges.

We last talked of God raising up Jephtha as a judge after the people had, once again, gotten stuck in the dreaded cycle of apostasy. The people of Israel turned back to God, and today we will read about what happened next.

### Judges 10:17-18

<sup>17</sup> Then the people of 'Amon gathered together and set up camp in Gil'ad, while the people of Isra'el assembled and camped at Mitzpah. <sup>18</sup> The people, the chiefs of Gil'ad, said to each other, "Whoever leads the battle against the army of 'Amon will be head over everyone living in Gil'ad."

Verse 17 describes two armies; one was Israel's army (a militia actually) who gathered at Mizpah on the west bank and the other was Ammon's army who assembled in Gilead in the Trans-Jordan. The time for confrontation between Israel and its eastern oppressor was at hand but something was missing; Israel did not have a field general. So the chiefs of Israel sat in council and decided that in order to get a general capable of achieving victory they'd have to offer him something of value. And that something of value was that if this general succeeded would become the head over all the Israelites who lived in Gilead.

Notice that what these council chiefs had in mind was not a judge or a tribal leader. First, a Judge, a Shophet, was a person raised up by God not a person chosen by men. A Judge ruled by divine fiat, not by human agreement. Second, Gilead was not an allotted tribal territory. In other words Gilead wasn't one of the 12 well-defined districts that had been assigned by Moses and Joshua to the one or the other of the 12 tribes of Israel. Rather this was a political region, set up by men. These men who formed the military general search committee could use the term "head" or "chief" when describing the position that this candidate would assume (if he was victorious), but in reality they all knew that this person would be a king.

### Judges 11:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Now Jephthah, a brave soldier from Gil'ad, was the son of a prostitute. His father, Gil'ad, <sup>2</sup> had other sons by his wife; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah away and told him, "You will not inherit from our father, because you are another woman's son." <sup>3</sup> Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the territory of Tov, where he enlisted a gang of rowdies who would go out raiding with him.

Here we learn a little bit of family history about Jephthah. Jephthah was a brave soldier; but he was also the son of a prostitute. His father was a Hebrew man, Gilead, who has sired other sons as well by means of his legal wife (again presumably a Hebrew). When Gilead's other sons grew up they drove Jephthah away because they didn't want to share their family inheritance with him.

In that time period, illegitimate children were often abandoned by the father and were not afforded the wealth of the family when the father died. However it seems that Gilead had an attack of conscience and must have made it clear to his legitimate sons that Jephthah was to be accorded family status such that he would even inherit some of the family's wealth; Gilead's legitimate sons weren't happy about this. Not only would Jephthah take away from their portion but also it brought this social misfit too near this family of aristocrats for comfort.

Jephthah left the area of Gilead and went to a place called Tov (which means *good*). And there he formed a gang, if you would, much like the man called Ga'al of the earlier chapter we just concluded had done. Jephthah must have gained quite a reputation as a fighter and a leader of fighters, because he would soon be in demand to rescue Israel from yet another oppression of foreigners.

Judges 11:4-11

<sup>4</sup> After a while the people of 'Amon made war against Isra'el. <sup>5</sup> When the army of 'Amon attacked Isra'el, the leaders of Gil'ad went to fetch Jephthah from the territory of Tov <sup>6</sup> and said to him, "Come and be our chief, so that we can fight the army of 'Amon." <sup>7</sup> Jephthah answered the leaders of Gil'ad, "Didn't you hate me so much that you forced me out of my father's house? Why are you coming to me now, when you're in trouble?" <sup>8</sup> The leaders of Gil'ad replied, "Here is why we've come back to you now: if you lead us in war with the people of 'Amon, you will be head over everyone living in Gil'ad." <sup>9</sup> Jephthah answered them, "If you bring me back home to fight the army of 'Amon, and *ADONAI* defeats them for me, I will be your head." <sup>10</sup> The leaders of Gil'ad said to Jephthah, "*ADONAI* is witness that we promise to do what you have said." <sup>11</sup> Then Jephthah went with the leaders of Gil'ad, and the people made him head and chief over them. Jephthah repeated all these conditions at Mitzpah in the presence of *ADONAI*.

Verse 4 sets the story into motion; the oppressive Ammonites made war against Israel, and the council of leaders of Gilead went to Jephthah to ask him to come and lead Gilead against Ammon. Naturally Jephthah isn't immediately keen to come to the aid of the people who had banished him and treated him so badly. Without doubt some of his estranged family members were part of the council and among those who approached him. Equally without doubt Jephthah must have been their last resort because it took the swallowing of a lot of pride to approach Jephthah and seek his help. Not only that but the price they would have to pay for his acceptance of the challenge was going to be huge and humiliating: Jephthah would become the undisputed head over all of Gilead. The people of Gilead, and the sons of Gilead, would bow down the son of a common harlot.

Jephthah made them repeat their promise to him and then make a covenant with him by invoking Jehovah's name to seal the deal. Even that wasn't good enough; Jephthah accompanied the council of elders back to their army headquarters at Mitzpah, and in a religious ceremony they were compelled to repeat his demands (which they again accepted with a vow).

With the agreement now publicly and spiritually acknowledged, Jephthah proceeded with the assigned mission. Surprisingly we find that this is a clever man and not simply some ignorant street thug; Jephthah's first step is to try and negotiate with the Ammonites. He tried to reason with the Ammonites in an effort to avoid war and loss of life, if it was possible. I suspect he knew that this had little chance of success, but it was worth the try. He showed himself to be a skilled negotiator, quite intellectual, and a clear thinker; but also a tough guy who doesn't back down.

## Judges 11:12-15

<sup>12</sup> Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of 'Amon to say, "What's your problem with us? Why are you invading our territory?" <sup>13</sup> The king of 'Amon answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Isra'el took away my territory when they came up from Egypt. They took everything from the Arnon to the Yabok and the Yarden. Now, restore it peacefully." <sup>14</sup> Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the people of 'Amon <sup>15</sup> with this response, "Here is what Jephthah has to say: 'Isra'el captured neither the territory of Mo'av nor the territory of the people of 'Amon.

Working through messengers he communicates a simple question to the king of the Ammonites:

*"What do you want and why are you coming here TO MY LAND to fight?"*

This message makes a couple of things clear; Jephthah did not represent himself as a hired gun, but rather as a patriot (MY land). Second it made it clear that as far as he was concerned there was no reasonable dispute over the land: it was Israel's land.

In verse 13 we get the Ammonite's response: Israel took this land from us and we lay claim to it and want it back. The king says the wrongful taking took place during the Exodus from Egypt and goes on to describe the area he contends is his: to the south, from the Arnon, which was the border between Moab to the south and Ammon to the north. Then the northern border of the disputed territory was described as the Jabbok, which was the ancient border between Ammon (on its south side) and Gilead to the north. The eastern boundary was the Jordan River.

The king of Ammon says to give them back the land and there won't have to be war. Now things are going to get a little complicated and VERY historical so hang in there with me because it is quite relevant.

## Judges 11:16-28

<sup>16</sup> But when Isra'el came up from Egypt, walked through the desert to the Red Sea and arrived at Kadesh, <sup>17</sup> then Isra'el sent messengers to the king of Edom, to say, "Please let us pass through your land." But the king of Edom wouldn't let them. He sent a similar message to the king of Mo'av, but neither would he, so Isra'el stayed at Kadesh. <sup>18</sup> Then they walked through the desert, around the territory of Edom and the territory of Mo'av, past the east border of the territory of Mo'av, and pitched camp on the other side of the Arnon; but they did not cross the border into Mo'av, for the Arnon was the border of Mo'av. <sup>19</sup> Isra'el sent messengers to Sichon king of the Emori and king of Heshbon with this message, "Please let us pass through your land to our own place." <sup>20</sup> But Sichon did not trust that Isra'el would only pass through his land, so he gathered all his people together, pitched camp in Yahatz and fought against Isra'el. <sup>21</sup> *ADONAI* the God of Isra'el handed Sichon and all his people over to Isra'el, and they killed them. Thus Isra'el possessed all the territory of the Emori who lived there. <sup>22</sup> They took possession of all the territory of the Emori from the Arnon to the Yabok and from the desert to the Yarden. <sup>23</sup> So now that *ADONAI* the God of Isra'el has expelled the Emori before his people Isra'el, do you think that you will expel us? <sup>24</sup> You should just keep the territory your god K'mosh has given you; while we, for our part, will hold onto whatever *ADONAI* our God has given us of the lands that belonged to others before us. <sup>25</sup> Really, are you better than Balak the son of Tzippor, king of Mo'av? Did he ever pick a quarrel with Isra'el or fight with us? <sup>26</sup> Isra'el lived in Heshbon and its villages, in 'Aro'er and its villages and in all the cities on the banks of the Arnon for three hundred years. Why didn't you take them back during that time? <sup>27</sup> No, I have done you no wrong. But you are doing me wrong to war against me. May *ADONAI* the Judge be judge today between the people of Isra'el and the people of 'Amon.'" <sup>28</sup> But the king of the people of 'Amon paid no attention to the message Jephthah sent him.

The king of Ammon's claim is nonsense and has no basis in fact. The fact is that the Ammonites had NEVER held this particular territory, because the Arnon River served as the border between Moab and the Amorites (Amorites, not Ammonites. The Amorites and Ammonites are in no way related). So Jephthah sent his

messengers back to the king of the Ammonites with what we find written in verses 15 –27 and here’s the gist of it: *Ammonites, you have no standing for your claim and I’m going to remind you of how everything occurred in Israel’s journey from Egypt to Canaan.*

Historically this is what happened: Israeli did NOT capture the territory of Moab or Ammon. What happened says Jephthah, is that during their Exodus Israel had arrived at Kadesh and camped there; in order to go any further Moses followed standard protocol of that era and sent messengers ahead of them to the king of Edom asking if they might be able to travel through his territory so they could get to their destination, Canaan. But the king of Edom refused. After marching around Edom, Moses sent a similar message to the king of Moab, but he also refused a right of way to pass through. So in addition to marching around Edom, Israel journeyed far to the east and north in order to march around Moab to avoid any trouble with them. The Arnon River was Moab’s recognized northern border, and Israel stayed north of that border to respect the king of Moab’s wishes.

Next, Israel sent messengers to Sichon, king of the Amorites whose royal city was Heshbon. Sichon not only refused but also got very hostile and actually went to war against Israel. Israel had threatened and done nothing against Sichon and had already proved that they would honor the territorial integrity of nations or territories that lay in the path of their journey to Canaan. The result of the attack from the Amorites was that God favored Israel, Sichon was defeated, and Israel took that territory that belonged to the Amorites (note: Amorites, not Ammonites) and that territory is now what is called Gilead.

Jephthah’s argument against the king of the Ammonites’ claim to the land of Gilead he says this: first, due to God’s instructions, Israel had no interest in conquering or even bothering the people of Ammon; they only respectfully asked to pass through that area in order to get to Canaan. However, because the king of the Amorites, Sichon, who ruled over the people of Ammon and Moab went to war with Israel (out of mistrust and paranoia), and because Israel won that war, whatever land the Amorites owned now by rights of conquest belonged to Israel. In fact the land that Ammon claimed for itself had NEVER belonged to the Ammonites to begin with; it belonged to the Amorites, the Ammonites had just lived there, and now it belonged to Israel since they took it from the Amorites.

The second argument he makes is theological and that argument begins in verse 23. Jephthah says that since the God of Israel enabled Israel to have victory over the Amorites, are you thinking that Israel is to hand that land over to the king of Ammon? Because obviously if Yehoveh gave the land to Israel, Ammon is certainly not going to be able to expel Israel now and Israel is not going to give it up.

In verse 24 we get a good example of the ancient oriental mind at work, and we see how the people of that era viewed the role of the gods. The logic goes like this: Yehoveh is the God of Israel. Yehoveh enabled his people to win the land of the Amorites. Therefore the land belonging to Israel’s god belongs to Israel. Chemosh is the god of Ammon. Whatever land Chemosh has enabled his people (the Ammonites) to win is all they should have. Why would the god of Israel want to voluntarily give up land under his control to another god?

Another argument is presented in verse 26. Jephthah says: Israel has dwelled in Heshbon and all its surrounding towns and all the villages near the Arnon River for 3 centuries. So how come only now, after 300 years, do you suddenly decide that land ought to be yours? Where have you been for the last 300 years?

It’s obvious that the king of Ammon had no legitimate claim over the land he wanted to fight Israel for. He simply wanted it and so came up with some convoluted reasoning as to why Israel ought to give it up, move out, and turn it over to him. Historically, Ammon had no legal claim to it. Theologically, Ammon had no religious claim to it. Even from a conquest standpoint, Ammon had no claim to the land because they had never conquered it, ruled over it or possessed it.

So, Jephthah realizes that there is no hope to continue the negotiations; if Ammon wants Gilead they’ll have to take it by force.