

# **“THE SON OF A PROSTITUTE”**

## *THE CANAANIZATION OF THE CHURCH*

**JUDGES 10:6-11:11, 29-40**

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What can we say in response to this difficult story in Holy Scripture about Jephthah? Let's try it this way: down, down, down, Israel continued spiritually to plummet. Although God had redeemed Israel many times, Israel had now been thoroughly Canaanized; **she had become like the nations** rather than a light to the nations. The visible church had become very apostate before God.

Who can save the Church that is camped out so close to Hell and so far from God? Who will be the judge to fight against Israel's enemies this time?

Israel was in *desperate spiritual trouble*. She has declined spiritually and suffered numerous times under foreign oppression without accomplishing the task of taking the Promised Land by faith in God's promises. Israel was spiritually in a tailspin; she is plunging deep into an idolatrously downward spiral –down, down, down, onward down, she goes, where she stops, nobody knows:

***ESV Judges 10:6 The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the LORD and did not serve him.***

We should remember as the people of God that Israel's failures are also our failures (1 Cor. 10:6-11). We have the same sinful condition and problem that Israel had- -a constant idolatrous temptation to wander and leave the God that we love.

Sin is not merely things we do, but sin is more particularly something we are by nature. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are by nature sinners. As God's people we must remember that sin is a constant struggle against the world, flesh and the devil. Sin is not something we rid ourselves of once in a lifetime, but is a condition that only God can fully cure- -and he promises that he will (Phil. 1:6).

All of our flirtations with sin, and taking grace for granted are really battles that we are having with God himself. Every time we disobey God, we are knowingly refusing to listen to him and to be obedient; the reason is that we want to hold the place of God and do what is right in our own eyes. Israel has prostituted herself to other gods- -so, who will save the Church now that she's practically Canaanized??

Who will be the judge to fight against Israel's enemies this time? Jephthah the Gileadite, one who is particularly and specifically described as the “son of a prostitute” (11:1) – NOT the son of a prophet (I didn't say prophet), but the son of a prostitute. Jephthah is a

judge who represented Israel's sinful condition, and one who is "like" Israel in her Canaanization in every way.

From our last sermon we learned that God had revealed his retribution against Abimelech in chapter 9 (9:56-57) for Abimelech's sins against God and man. After Abimelech, Tola (son of Puah) judged Israel for twenty-three years (10:1-2), and then he died like all the other judges. Then Jair judged Israel twenty-two years and he also died (10:3-5).

***What should be noted is that after Abimelech the Bible is not telling us that God raised up these judges, but that they simply "arose" (10:1, 3).***

The term "arose" [Heb. ~Wq vb. arise, stand up, stand, pronounced "koom"] is usually used in Judges to describe autonomous, non-Spirit-guided behavior. This is important for our passage I believe.

***ESV Judges 2:10** And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel.*

***ESV Judges 8:21** Then Zebah and Zalmunna said, "Rise yourself and fall upon us, for as the man is, so is his strength." And Gideon arose and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and he took the crescent ornaments that were on the necks of their camels.*

***ESV Judges 10:1** After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, and he lived at Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim.*

What is also missing specifically in our passage this morning (a glaring omission for a Judge-Warrior-Deliverer-Savior of God) is that the Holy Spirit is not mentioned as leading, guiding and making powerful these judges at the beginning of chapter 10 (cf. 3:9-10; 6:34) and for most of chapter 11 until verse 29; the point seems to be that the people are seeking to deliver themselves this time- -but even when they do, God still shows grace to his believing people.

The Book of Judges began with God showing his constant mercy and faithfulness to the Israelites by "raising up" judges; God took the sovereign and gracious initiative to raise up judges to deliver Israel (Judges 2:16, 18; 3:9, 15). We are reminded:

***ESV Judges 2:16** Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them.*

***ESV Judges 2:18** Whenever the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who afflicted and oppressed them.*

In contrast to the earlier times recorded in Judges, it is important to note that in Judges 10-11, we are not told that God raised up the Judge Jephthah; nor are we told that God was with the judge initially.

Now we should state again that nothing happens outside of God's sovereignty. God rules and reigns over the world and especially over his people. However, from a saving perspective, God is not raising up the judges that appear in our passage today. Yes, God uses them; yes, God works through them and has a purpose for them; **but they are not called, ordained, and sent by God's Spirit to accomplish Israel's deliverance.**

Some of these judges are in a sense more like anti-Christ if I might put it in this stark and perhaps provocative manner. That is, rather than these judges particularly being like Christ, they reveal how unlike Christ they are.

Again, Israel is described as covenant-breaking failures specifically in chapter 10, verses 1-5. We are told again in 10:6: *"The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth..."*

The text goes on specifically to describe all of Israel's gods (not just "Baal-berith" but others!), indicating how thoroughly Canaanized that they were. We are to ask: **"Is there any hope at all for God's Church?"** The Israelites now specifically serve the Baals, the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines (10:6).

There have been seven judges thus far who have delivered Israel; Israel is now specifically serving seven specific false gods. These are the specific seven nations that God through Moses had told the Israelites to dispossess from the land:

*ESV Deuteronomy 7:1-5: "When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, <sup>2</sup> and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction.<sup>1</sup> You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.<sup>3</sup> You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, <sup>4</sup> for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. <sup>5</sup> But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire.*

We are to ask here: "Are there any gods whom they **do not serve**?" So bad was Israel's spiritual condition, that they had completely forsaken the LORD who has saved them in the Exodus (10:7).

Because of Israel's constant unfaithfulness, covenant disobedience, and sins against God, God sold them into the hands of the Philistines and Ammonites and they were crushed and oppressed, and Israel was severely distressed (10:8-10).

And here is where things get a bit difficult, and God reveals himself in an unexpected and sobering way. In contrast to the other times that Israel has been oppressed and afflicted by foreign powers, they have called to God and he has raised up a Judge-Deliverer to save and redeem the Israelites from their enemies.

This time the people of Israel cry out to God, even admitting their sin against God. The people even admit to forsaking God and having become idolaters (10:10). God answers by reminding them of his grace and goodness in the past, and his redemptive-salvation-goodness that he has faithfully shown to them when they did not deserve it (10:11-12).

God has been covenantally faithful and the people covenantally unfaithful. The people have depended upon God's grace, but their hearts had not learned to fear him. The people took God's grace and mercy for granted and in the place of obedience as a response to God's grace, they trampled upon God's grace, cheapened it by their sin and disobedience, and apostatized by committing heinous idolatrous acts with the idols of other nations who did not know God!

This time, rather than rescuing or redeeming Israel, God tells the people of Israel to call out to the gods they have chosen (10:14). Here God condones the doctrine of free will; free will is doing what one really most wants to do (for sinners that means idolatry!).

God tells the people to use their free will; they can call out to the gods that they have freely chosen. What we must not fail to see however is that God also reveals here that when sinful man uses his free will, or choice it is to whore after false gods rather than the True and Living God; as the Apostle Paul puts it, quoting the Psalmist: "No one seeks after God" and our Lord Jesus says: "No one can (has the ability) to come to me unless the Father who sent me drags them by his grace" (Romans 3; John 6:44ff).

God must sovereignly change the hearts of sinners so that people might truly choose him and follow him and serve him; otherwise, sinful men will freely choose false gods.

This time, God revealed himself to Israel as the God who reads hearts and knows what is truly in them. God is angry with Israel and there will be great consequences; God has not sent a prophet or a judge, but he himself spoke to Israel.

God knows that Israel is wicked and acting manipulative toward him and taking advantage of his grace and the end of his mercy has come for now. God knows that Israel has said that they were repentant before; God knows that Israel has gotten rid of the false gods before; God knows that every time Israel was redeemed, they would whore after the false gods again showing that they were never truly repentant as a people.

Israel has learned idolatry and so is becoming more like idolaters behave. Idolatry teaches would-be worshippers to manipulate the gods because they are not necessarily covenantally good to those who serve and worship them ("Baal-berith cannot be trusted at times, so manipulate him..."). Israel's Canaanization is revealed in the way that they use this technique of manipulation now with YHWH.

What is specifically different about the revelation of God this time is that YHWH is revealed as the God who has become “impatient” with Israel’s miserable and sinful condition before him (10:16- The verse could be translated literally: “God’s soul was short because of the efforts of Israel” or as ESV translates: “God became impatient over the misery of Israel”).

In response to this “surprising” revelation of God- -Israel continued to ask God to deliver them and even shows obedience to him by putting away the foreign gods from among them and they served the LORD (10:16). But what we must understand is that Israel is not being sincere- -Israel is showing worldly sorrow, but not genuine repentance toward God and God sees and knows the heart. As the Psalmist says of Israel before God throughout redemptive-history:

*ESV Psalm 78:36-37: But they flattered him with their mouths; they lied to him with their tongues. <sup>37</sup> Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not faithful to his covenant.*

As Professor Block teaches insightfully: “The repentance [of Israel] is external only; theirs is a conversion of convenience... These people are interested only in relief from their oppressors. Because their confession lacks sincerity, Yahweh will withdraw and be used by this parasitic people no longer” (NAC, pg. 349).

The people have sinned against God again and again; their consciences have become seared and their ears deaf to God’s revelation of himself. The people have become so used to their sins that this is “normal” for them. They have depended upon God and his mercy so many times that they have learned to take his fatherly kindness and grace for granted.

Because of Israel’s folly, she deserved the discipline and chastisement of God, but God cannot stand to see his people miserable and crushed (this is the meaning of God’s “impatience” here). The text describes God’s feelings anthropomorphically (like a man) as “impatient over the misery of Israel” (10:16). God’s heart of compassion for sinners is revealed here.

This passage reveals the Lord’s pity on his sinful people. If it had not been for the Lord’s pity, the people would never have made it. The gates of hell would have surely prevailed against Israel- -this is the way apart from grace that Israel would have chosen!

Think of yourself as those who are parents. When your children act sinfully and foolishly you rightly chastise them and discipline them. You also don’t necessarily give them what they want or need if you think they’re being manipulative.

But you also struggle when they struggle under your discipline. You cannot stand to see them suffer even though you know it is for their good. This is the compassion and mercy of God that is revealed with his sovereign judgment as well.

Let us dare not think of God as a cosmic genie who we think that we can live any way we want, and only obey and serve him when we need something.

God should never be taken for granted. God can choose not to deliver his people. God can indeed grant repentance and faith through chastisement, but he can also withdraw his sovereign grace and allow the consequences of our sins to come to fruition.

But in response to Israel's mere manipulative words of repentance and godly sorrow, and in response to the deeds that seem to follow that Israel means to be faithful this time, no mention is made of a Judge-Warrior-Deliverer-Savior being specifically raised up, commissioned and Spirit-filled by God (remember that what is left out that was once mentioned is important to take note of in biblical literature).

We are told of a battle against Israel's enemies in 10:17-18, but no judge has come riding over the hill or mountain to deliver; no judge has been spotted on the horizon coming to deliver Israel against the Ammonites and other enemies of God and Israel. Chapter 10 ends with this dilemma: ***“Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites?”***

Jephthah, a mighty warrior, who was the son of a prostitute, appeared on the scene. All that occurred in Jephthah's time as warrior is happening in light of God's sovereignty. From the text, from the human perspective however, we are purposely left in the dark as readers to ponder whether any of what follows was God's answer to Israel's prayer. While God was moved by pity, Jephthah was moved only by self-interest and personal ambition (like some of the other judges such as Gideon and Abimelech, Webb, *New Bible Commentary*, pg. 277).

Let's focus on Jephthah (and we should be reminded of the axiom that truth is much stranger than fiction; this truthful and inspired account of a man's life is very strange and stranger than fiction could ever conceive!).

Let's not forget the “world” in which we all live (and Israel particularly in our text). It is a world of idolatry and unfaithfulness to God; it is a lawless world where man lives in an autonomous fashion.

***It is more particularly a world where sons of prostitutes are used by God to deliver His enemies and a world where sons of prostitutes sacrifice their daughters to God because of rash and foolish vows that should not have been made.***

Jephthah's mother was a prostitute (11:1-2). Perhaps Jephthah's mother was made pregnant by Jephthah's father when he went to the temple of a foreign Canaanite god;

perhaps she was a temple prostitute. We are not told the details, but it is highly probably that Jephthah's mother was not only a prostitute, but a *Canaanite prostitute*.

The author of Judges gave this particular description of Jephthah was to teach us how thoroughly Canaanized Israel had become in her idolatrous law breaking. First of all, the marriage covenant was to be honored and women were not to be treated as prostitutes (Gen. 34:31; 38:23; Amos 7:17). Secondly, if Jephthah's mother was an Israelite then there has been lawbreaking in that a daughter of Israel has been sold into prostitution (Lev. 19:29). Thirdly, if she is a Canaanite then there is a law-violation of God's forbidden intercourse with Canaanites (Exodus 34:15-16; Deut. 7:1-5).

Jephthah's father committed adultery against his wife, just as Israel had committed adultery against YHWH who had been as a father and husband to Israel.

We must understand that this normally would have been the last man on Israel's list to judge and lead and deliver them – but things were not normal!! As the answer to “*Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites?*” It was certainly NOT supposed to be someone like Jephthah (you can imagine when they heard who it was to be: “*No, that can't be- -anyone but him!!*”).

But when times got tough for Israel, they took their redemption into their own hands, and they remembered that there was a keen and powerful warrior named Jephthah, a son of a prostitute. The leader-elders of Gilead went to Jephthah asking him to come and deliverer them from the hands of the Ammonites. The leader-elders are also showing signs of sinful manipulation and seeking Jephthah out for this mission.

Israel was opportunistically seeking out a bandit, a brigand, a tough guy, a thug, a gang leader, a “Michael Corleone”, a “Tony Soprano” to lead them this time and deliver them from oppression under the Ammonites (Jephthah is described as one who was in a group of “worthless fellows” or literally “empty men” that means morally empty men, see also 9:4 where Abimelech is described as one who hangs out with these kind of morally empty vagrants or renegades).

***Has anyone in Israel thought about waiting upon the LORD and waiting to see who God might choose; or is this action because God refused to deliver them this time and they are trying to secure their redemption in their own power and strength? The author of Judges wants us to understand that everything that follows is a mere human event; God is relegated to the role of silent witness (although he will act through these events).***

Jephthah's reputation in the ancient world (as well as in most communities today, although some wouldn't admit it) would have been embarrassing; his genealogy would have not been traceable back to the covenant faithfulness of his godly parents (and perhaps this is part of the lesson we are to learn here?!).

Jephthah's presence as the Judge of Israel reminds all God's people of embarrassing sinfulness. Jephthah is the son of a prostitute that highlights and reminds us of how all of our sinfulness has overturned and turned upside down God's order established in creation. Jephthah is a man who lives in shame culturally among "worthless fellows" (11:3) who live as desert pirates or those who rob caravans or tents when they needed to eat (I owe the thought of desert pirates to Pastor Mark Davis' sermon on Jephthah).

Jephthah is described as a mighty warrior who was strong and could fight (11:1a) - yet Jephthah was not a *righteous* warrior. Jephthah had brothers because his father had other sons through his wife. This caused strife and pain for Jephthah because his brothers knew he was the son of a prostitute and therefore they kicked him out of their home, kept his inheritance from him and he gathered around himself some really rough fellows in a faraway country (11:3).

Jephthah agreed to fight for Israel and if God granted him favor he promised that he will be their head, or leader (11:8-9). Then the rash and manipulative vows before God and man are spewed forth: the leader-elders of Gilead vow before the LORD and other men that they will restore Jephthah to their community and he will be their leader if he delivers them as they so desperately needed.

Jephthah also vows before God that he will serve them as leader (11:10-11- this foreshadowing for another vow as well and mirrors the vow that the opportunistic Israelites have promised to Jephthah to be leader upon proving himself in this victory).

There is manipulation all through our passage this morning: Israel manipulates God with false repentance in order to get delivered from their sinful predicament, but God refuses. The leaders of Israel manipulate Jephthah by promising to make him a "somebody", or one who leads in Israel if he helps them out of this tight spot. Jephthah manipulates God with a rash vow so that he might have a victory against the Ammonites.

What should be noted here as we list other differences in this narrative from what has come before in *The Book of Judges*, is that God is revealed as sovereignly passive. As Old Testament Professor K. Lawson Younger writes:

"Unlike past instances where he played the decisive role in raising up the deliverers, Yahweh is relegated to the role of silent witness to a purely human contrast between a desperate but opportunistic people and an ambitious, opportunistic outlaw. In 10:10-16, Yahweh had refused to let himself be used by Israel. Nevertheless, Jephthah and the Gileadites have no hesitation in using him to seal their agreement" (NIVAC, pg. 252).

Old Testament scholar Barry Webb also writes: "The Lord was moved by pity (10:16); Jephthah was apparently moved only by self-interest and personal ambition. He out negotiated the negotiators, while the Lord stood in the background as the silent witness of all that had taken place" (New Bible Commentary, pg. 277).



Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and defends Israel's position in the land. The messengers of Jephthah spoke confidently to the king of the Ammonites telling them that there is no reason why they should battle Israel (11:12-26).

Jephthah's messengers boldly tell the king of the Ammonites that they have not sinned against the king and declare that he is in the wrong by making war on Israel (using the history recorded in Numbers 20-21). Then Jephthah invokes the Name of YHWH in the king of the Ammonites' presence; he said to him: "*The LORD, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon.*"

But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah (11:27-28).

After Jephthah's declaration of truth, after Jephthah confesses rightly that YHWH is the true and living Judge, then the author tells us that the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah (11:29). Contrary to how Jephthah's life began; contrary to how the story of Jephthah began; contrary to the fact that God doesn't seem to have specifically raised up Jephthah as he had the other judges, the Spirit of God was upon Jephthah for service now.

As soon as we are told that God would guide Jephthah, he resorts to unholy talk, and specifically makes a tragic vow that will once again reveal the hearts of many in Israel. Folly is displayed here in such a way that is truly sobering for God's people.

Rather than trusting in the LORD and in His Word that God had already spoken to Israel (and to Moses and Joshua before him), Jephthah, like Gideon thinks he must do something in addition to God's Word to guarantee his victory and assure him of God's faithfulness to him.

Jephthah vows to the LORD that if God will be faithful to him, then "*whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering*" (11:30-31).

***ESV Ecclesiastes 5:2 Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.***

Because of God's faithfulness to Jephthah, the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel (11:33).

It seems that what we have here with Jephthah's vow about his daughter being offered up as a 'thank offering' or 'victory offering' ("burnt offering", 11:30-31) is that Jephthah is theologically ignorant and/or confused about about God and His Word.

Jephthah was still practically and theologically living and thinking as a Canaanite. Jephthah was living as if he were under the rule and reign of Molech/Milcom, the god of the Ammonites, or Chemosh the god of the Moabites. The pagan Canaanite gods accepted child sacrifices as pleasing offerings to themselves (Judges 10:10; see also Lev. 18:21; 20:1-5; cf. 2 Kings 3:27).

When Jephthah addresses the true God, he says: “If you will give the Ammonites into my hand...” (11:30); I think there is theological confusion going on here. Jephthah has worshipped and served Molech/Milcom, the god of the Ammonites for so long, that he thinks that the vows and sacrifices that would be accepted by Molech/Milcom would also be appropriate for YHWH, the True and Living God!

Jephthah doesn't know that it will be his daughter to come out of the house- -but he doesn't know that it won't be either! It would have been most likely a human being to come out of his house: “...whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me...” (perhaps he means an animal for sacrifice- -but he keeps the sacrificial vow nevertheless of a human which shows his confused theology).

This is another practical aspect or sinful consequential repercussion of a person's idolatry. After awhile of bondage and slavery and service to a false god, one's theology, one's life and doctrine becomes totally informed by wicked lies and harmful beliefs rather than a knowledge of God's Word. It seems that Jephthah is being directed by God's Spirit to accomplish God's desire (11:29), but the point of the author here is that Jephthah himself does not know which God/god he is truly serving.

This is theological confusion of most drastic proportions! Great have been the sinful acts of mankind throughout history because of false theology and believing a lie. Think of all the great religious wars of humanity where men and women have given their very lives to false gods because of false theology.

Additionally, we must also note not only Jephthah's ignorance and false theology, but also his manipulative character. Jephthah vows to YHWH in order to get YHWH to give him the victory (His vow is self-centered) and just like Israel (10:13-16) in that he uses manipulation to obtain victory, to be made leader by the opportunistic Israelites, and to be restored in position and honor as a noble warrior (his reputation as a son of a prostitute would then be forgotten and overshadowed by victory).

In this ignorant, rash, and manipulative vow, God is completely silent. God does not promise Jephthah anything; God does not respond in voice or with action to prevent him from acting; God is simply silent and let's Jephthah freely continue to sin.

But it's easy for us to sit back in this climate-controlled facility this morning and judge 'ol Jephthah! It's easy for us to think that if we had been in his war sandals *we would not have vowed rashly*. But the truth is we try to manipulate and bargain with God, too!

How many times have you prayed not “Thy will be done, thy kingdom come” but “My will be done”: “God, if you will only spare my wife, I'll serve you more faithfully”; “Lord, if you take away this sin, I will never succumb to temptation again”; “Lord, if you really love me, then will you show it by taking away my circumstances?”; “Lord, if you are real and true, then would you prove it to me by answering this prayer in my way?”

Oh yes, we manipulate and bargain with God too- -but God will not be manipulated and bargained with. We see in our story that God is merciful and gracious; Jephthah just had to revel in that truth and reality! Jephthah did not have to bargain with God, his tragic and murderous pagan-like vow was unnecessary.

Such a waste, but such is life in all its confused complexities and confoundedness. Don't any of you ever tell me that bad theology is not dangerous! Bad theology can kill you and others. Bad theology is a prescription for stupid acts that God does not require from us. What if Jephthah, rather than making a rash vow, had just trusted God for his grace and mercy, and simply trusted God's Word and Spirit?

Things might have been different for him - -and his precious daughter.

And here is where our story takes on tragic proportions- -unbelievable sin and the consequences of them! Here we see how wrong theology and the manipulation of God can only end in great tragedy and bloodshed.

When Jephthah returned home from the victory that God had given to Israel (although the author does not specifically tell us that God gave them into Israel's hand, or that God had subdued them like in the story of Barak, 4:23), his daughter comes out to greet him. Not cattle, not a sheep, not a bull, but Jephthah's beloved daughter who is a virgin (11:34).

Jephthah thinks confusedly how his vow to the LORD cannot be taken back in his estimation (11:35). He explained this to his beloved daughter and she told her father to fulfill his vow that he had made to the LORD (11:37).

Jephthah fulfilled his vow to the LORD and eventually killed his only daughter, the only hope of an heir to his family. His daughter who was a virgin died as a virgin and was lamented annually by the daughters (11:38-40). This tragic event was remembered four days each year by the daughters of Israel.

Jephthah killed his daughter. Darkness. Pitch back darkness. Desperately hopeless. The True and Living God revealed clearly through His Word that human sacrifice was a great sin; to break one's vows was a great sin (Numbers 30:2; Leviticus 27). In Jephthah's theological confusion he tried to keep a vow (one important value) even if it meant to sacrifice a human in order to keep it. The vow should have been truly repented of (and the sin forgiven before God).

Jephthah ironically keeps one of God's commands, but he does it by breaking another one, and which transgression is greater is hard to estimate here (although it is clear in Scripture that some sins are more heinous than other ones).

*ESV Deuteronomy 12:31 You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.*

Jephthah's only daughter (he did not have a son); this was Jephthah's heir and the only hope of a male heir in the future (11:34). The son of a prostitute becomes the murderer of a virgin; between the two female poles of prostitute and virgin, Jephthah lived his sinful life. No past; no future. No hope that his daughter might give birth to the One who would crush the head of the serpent as God had promised in Genesis 3:15!

***Jephthah desired glory and all that was remembered about him was not his great victory, rather it was his daughter who was immortally memorialized in her sacrifice (11:39-40).***

Would Jephthah be remembered as the son of a prostitute? Yes and even worse, the son of a prostitute who killed his daughter.

Jephthah judged Israel for six years and then he died and was buried in Gilead (12:7).

This story of Jephthah should remind us that the Bible shows us the truth "warts and all". Jephthah was a sinful man who was not of noble birth, nor had the best circumstances to be what we might call successful today. Jephthah was a troubled man- -yet we should not be troubled by his story.

Jephthah had great issues and made bad mistakes, but he is in the Bible to teach and instruct us.

Let's think about this passage. We can and should make vows as acts of worship in God's economy (Psalm 56, 61); Jephthah is not an example that we shouldn't vow. He is an example of how we should never be quick to vow and certainly we must be cautious to vow only that which we will keep before God because of His grace.

We must watch our mouths and what we say before God and man as we read from Ecclesiastes earlier.

Why would God allow a story that is so imperfect and so difficult for us to understand? Why would the author of Judges under the inspiration of the Spirit desire to teach us? What is consistent with all the judges is that God again is defeating his enemies and his people's enemies (this time against the Ammonites). Despite Israel's hopelessness, God is still acting as Divine Warrior against His enemies.

The world of sin and misery is made clear in our passage. This is a world that only Christ could save! This is a world that is hopelessly sinful apart from Jesus Christ!

The death and resurrection of Jesus sheds light on Jephthah because he brings order where there is chaos; Jesus brings hope where there is nothing but desperation; Jesus brings life where there is death; Jesus brings true and permanent redemption where there is slavery and bondage to sin; where there is sin, there is death for sinners.

We shouldn't forget that there was a vow of sacrifice that Jephthah could have made before YHWH that would have been acceptable in light of the LORD's victory. Moses taught about it in Leviticus 7: the peace offering. The peace offering could be offered for thanksgiving and for vows.

*ESV Leviticus 7:11-12: "And this is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings that one may offer to the LORD. <sup>12</sup> If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the thanksgiving sacrifice unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and loaves of fine flour well mixed with oil.*

In light of God's giving Jephthah and Israel victory over their enemies, Jephthah could have vowed to God with a sacrificial peace offering that was commanded by God:

*ESV Leviticus 7:13-18: With the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving he shall bring his offering with loaves of leavened bread. <sup>14</sup> And from it he shall offer one loaf from each offering, as a gift to the LORD. It shall belong to the priest who throws the blood of the peace offerings. <sup>15</sup> And the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day of his offering. He shall not leave any of it until the morning. <sup>16</sup> But if the sacrifice of his offering is a vow offering or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that he offers his sacrifice, and on the next day what remains of it shall be eaten. <sup>17</sup> But what remains of the flesh of the sacrifice on the third day shall be burned up with fire. <sup>18</sup> If any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten on the third day, he who offers it shall not be accepted, neither shall it be credited to him. It is tainted, and he who eats of it shall bear his iniquity.*

Jephthah rather than rashly vowing and sacrificing his innocent daughter (not innocent of sin!) to YHWH and doing that which is forbidden in his sight could have given a sacrificial vow offering out of thanksgiving to God for his victory and grace (Deut. 12:1-15).

God the Father in His great wisdom and love allowed the sacrifice of the innocent for the guilty. Sometimes Christ-types in the Old Covenant can be women (as with Deborah). Jephthah's innocent daughter (innocent of the vow and the sins of her father, not without moral guilt) was sacrificed wrongly; God's sacrifice of His son was to redeem his own people.

God's sacrifice was not wrong, because His innocent and godly son willingly gave up his life for his own. God's sacrifice in His son is a vow to his people that if they believe, then their sins will be forgiven and by grace they will be received as his dear and beloved children.

God covenantally vowed in Jesus Christ that whosoever believes in Christ shall never die but live forever in God's presence- -people like Jephthah included!

*ESV Ezekiel 16:6-8: "And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' <sup>7</sup> I made you*

*flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. <sup>8</sup> "When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord GOD, and you became mine.*

Even while Israel sinned and had become thoroughly Canaanized in thought and behavior; even though Israel had become confused theologically as to who God was and what he required, God preserved a remnant of his people who believed because of God's covenant vow in Jesus Christ!

Jesus who knew no sin, who was innocent, was sacrificed by the Father so that he might become "sin" in God's sight and be sacrificed on the cross for the sins of God's people- -including Jephthah's sin- -that's the incredible grace and beauty of this passage:

*ESV Hebrews 11:32-34: And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets- <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.*

Jephthah's entire life is not recorded for us, but sometime after this, perhaps because of the sacrifice of his daughter, he truly repented and found grace in his time of trouble.

Jephthah, "son of a prostitute", a sinful and manipulative man, who sought his own glory in his sin, experienced the true glory that God reveals when he seeks and saves idolatrous sinners who are desperately lost. We know from Hebrews 11:32-34 that God granted victory ultimately to sad Jephthah; we see here in Jephthah's life two important things about our God and his love for his own:

Salvation is without any merit and cannot be based on our deserving- -it is ALL of grace. God is gracious and merciful and is determined to save his Canaanite-like idolatrous people even though his people don't necessarily care to be saved themselves. Idolatrous folks will still continue to call out to the idols of their own making without grace!

Jephthah's daughter and her memory was memorialized; Jesus Christ's memory and blood for his own is memorialized in the Lord's Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me," Jesus says.

Jesus' vow is what saves and delivers us; Jesus' blood and sacrifice is what redeems us!

CRB

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