

Judges 11-12

Good evening, it is wonderful to be here with you all tonight.

We will continue our study of the Book of Judges tonight.

We will be in Chapters 11 and 12...

Let us pray before we get into it.

Now, we should remember where we left off last week.

We ended chapter 10 learning that Israel, after 18 years of oppression from the Ammonites finally broke down and repented and turned to God.

And after they put away their foreign god's we read in... **Judges 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."

Israel had forsaken the Lord for so long, that they lacked any real leadership; no one was loyal to the Lord, enough for them to get behind and follow.

So, because there was this void in Israel, no real men of God, they put out this job offer.

Notice they are not seeking God on who their leader should be, and they are still using worldly wisdom.

Now, we will meet, the only man in Israel during this time who qualifies as a godly leader, and tonight we will get a picture of how far Israel has walked away from their God.

The only leader they could find, was a man, who knew Yahweh, but was also raised in the corruption of pagan worship.

His mixed understanding of faith will prove to be a great tragedy for Jephthah.

So let us read verses 1-3 here in chapter 11 to see the circumstances that bring this man into the position to lead Israel.

Jephthah

11:1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah. 2 Gilead's wife bore sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out, and said to him, "You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." 3 Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob; and worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out raiding with him.

The first thing we notice is Jephthah was a mighty man of valor, he was an outstanding leader.

But he had a huge strike against him, he like Abimelech was an illegitimate son.

He was the son of a prostitute, but unlike Abimelech, he had not been brought up in his mother's house.

His father Gilead, kept him, until his legitimate sons were grown, and they rose up against him.

Illegitimacy is a stigma that stayed with a person from birth regardless of how great the man was.

So this man was cast out by the true heirs of Gilead.

Perhaps because of jealousy, as they saw their half-brother grow in strength and stature, they wanted the competition eliminated.

This must have taken place at the death of Gilead, because it was inheritance that was disputed.

Jephthah went to Tob, and established a life there.

This man's ability to lead stands out, as many worthless men serve under him.

We see this man, as King David was, was being prepared for his calling in his hiding and running, and with those in society that no one else desired.

Remember when King David was on the run from the crazed King Saul.

It says in...

1 Sam 22:2 And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was

discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him.

Both King David and Jephthah unbeknownst to them were being prepared by God to deliver the very people who came against them.

So Jephthah now leading a band of outlaws and building quite the reputation as they raided the surrounding people groups is brought now to the forefront of the Book of Judges.

And this man, with so much working against him, he is the son of a harlot, he has been exiled by his own family, and he is a leader of a despised group of men.

Now, as we have seen, over and over again, all throughout scripture, it is usually the one that no one would ever guess, that God uses to bring glory to His Name.

And Jephthah the Unwanted, will be the very one that God wants.

Look at verses 4-11 now...

4 It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Israel. 5 And so it was, when the people of Ammon made war against Israel, that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. 6 Then they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon."

7 So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?"

8 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

9 So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the Lord delivers them to me, shall I be your head?"

10 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The Lord will be a witness between us, if we do not do according to your words." 11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord in Mizpah.

Now, it seems that no one applied for the job offered in [Judges 10:18](#) 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."

No one stepped forward... So the leaders sent out a delegation to seek the only man whom they saw capable, the unwanted brother Jephthah.

And they give Jephthah an incredible proposition, they ask him to command them.

But it really seems that the elders had a part in his expulsion.

Perhaps the legitimate heirs of Gilead brought their despised brother before them.

We see in verse seven Jephthah's response to the elders of Gilead.

He is remembering a time, when they showed hatred, and perhaps indignation toward him, they were the ones who sentenced him to exile.

Now, as God usually does, he exalts the despised, what would be considered foolish, and weak.

God lifts Jephthah up, and the once proud elders of Gilead are now shamefully humbled before this base man.

There reply to Jephthah in verse 8 is from a desperate and humiliated place.

None of his arrogant brothers, nor any of the elders were courageous enough to rise to the occasion.

They were cowards, and here in isolation the survivor, the scrapper, the brave troublemaker was made into a leader through severe trials.

Church, never, ever despise the hard times in your life, never ever lose heart when disappointment comes, never, ever give up when trials are coming against your life.

This is how God makes His man or woman.

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

For me, I used to beg God to get me out of Lake Havasu, I knew I was called into ministry fulltime; God had made that clear to me.

And I could never understand why I was stuck in that miserable desert framing houses, leading crews of misfits.

But as I look back, I can see clearly now, that all the trials and hardships of that season, the great disappointments, the great anxiety, everything was to prepare Jess and I for our calling to serve in ministry.

I remember reading a Book in about my 3rd year of fulltime ministry.

The Book was called Spiritual Leadership by Oswald Sanders, and in chapter 5, a chapter titled “Can you become a leader?”

He points out that Jesus chose His workers from the ranks of the working class, not professional clergy.

And He gives a list with some suggestions on how to investigate your potential for leadership.

And every single one of the items he listed in regards to spiritual leadership, God developed in me on that miserable job-site leading those crews.

For 6 years, I was asking God to use me, to save me from the misery of that hot desert.

I wanted to go to Bible College, or Seminary.

But it was there in the desert, that He dealt with my pride, I call that season of life, "My Great Humbling."

And it was there He built into my character His spiritual disciplines.

Looking back, I was in school, the school of Hard Knocks, but that was the way I needed to be taught.

Maybe tonight, you believe God has a certain calling on your life.

Maybe you think you are in the wrong place to get to that calling.

You are going through trials and tribulations, and you cannot understand why you are going through the things you are going through.

You know God has called you to be a teacher or a leader, yet you seem so far away from that place.

Please know that wherever you are in this life, it is no accident, although you do not completely understand it all now, you will look back at this season, and it will make sense.

Whatever you are going through right now, it is preparing you for what God has next in your life.

Even though you are in Tob, with a band of misfits, God is developing in you the qualities He needs in you.

So it is interesting here in verse 10, the elders invoke the Name of God, that He will be a witness to the contract.

They will let the illegitimate Jephthah rule over them, if he comes and leads them.

Now, it seems they know Jephthah is somewhat of a godly man, they know that Yahweh's Name would solidify this arrangement.

They do not evoke the name of Baal, or Molech, but they are truly trying to seek their God once again.

But we will see, their knowledge of their God is mixed and futile.

Even Jephthah will be incomplete in his understanding, the Word of God has been inactive now for approximately 300 years, during this period of Judges.

And although they want to come back to their God, they are not seeking Him in His Word.

So the agreement is made here, and Jephthah assumes the command.

And we will see next he is a wise man, he is a warrior, and knows the cost of war and fighting.

You see those years in Tob have given him much wisdom, he is not quick to fight, or a quarrelsome man. He shows the godly qualities that are written about in **James 1:19-20 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

And Jephthah will be slow to wrath, and will first try diplomacy as he takes the mantle of leadership...

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 before he declares war, Jephthah tries peaceful negotiations.

This man Jephthah is a gifted leader, maybe even the most gifted out of all the judges we see in this book, he is mostly known for the terrible vow he makes in the next section.

But he is mentioned in Hebrews 11 verse 32 in the Great Hall of Faith.

He is a man of godly character... and this should be noted, in his limited understanding of God, He pursued God with great faith.

And we will next see he is not only a good fighter, not only is he a great military commander, but he was a well-spoken negotiator.

And here we see he identifies with his people of Israel, that once rejected him.

To the king of Ammon that has come up against Israel, Jephthah asks, "What do you have against me, that you have come to fight with me in my land."

We cannot overlook that statement, as he and the nation are spoken of as one unit.

This rejected man, is now leading his family, and reconciled to those who have hurt him deeply.

Jephthah gets a response from the king of Ammon, and he replies with an accusation, that Israel took the land from them when they came out of Egypt.

And he demands it be returned to him.

Consider now that many centuries have passed since the incident the king of Ammon is referring too.

If Jephthah were a fool, he would not know if the statement was true or false.

But we will get a glimpse into this leaders wisdom, as he gives the true historical record next...

14 So Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, 15 and said to him, "Thus says Jephthah: 'Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon; 16 for when Israel came up from Egypt, they walked through the wilderness as far as the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. 17 Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let me pass through your land." But the king of Edom would not heed. And in like manner they sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained in Kadesh. 18 And they went along through the wilderness and bypassed the land of Edom and the land of Moab, came to the east side of the land of Moab, and encamped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the border of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab. 19 Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon; and Israel said to him, "Please let us pass through your land into our place." 20 But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together, encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. 21 And the Lord God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. Thus Israel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. 22 They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan.

23 'And now the Lord God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel; should you then possess it? 24 Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the Lord our God takes possession of before us, we will possess. 25 And now, are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he ever fight against them? 26 While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon, for three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time? 27 Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the Lord, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon.'" 28 However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him.

So Jephthah presents the true facts of history.

We see not only is he a diplomat but also a historian and has done his homework

Winston Churchill once said "The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see."

A good leader should have a good grasp for history, and be able to learn from those who have gone before them.

Jephthah is a student of history, and he informs the king of Ammon that Moses and the Israelites were careful not to encroach on the territories of Edom and Moab.

They went around their territories and encamped by in a territory held by the Amorites, who refused safe passage to Israel as well.

The Amorites attacked Israel, and God gave Israel the victory, which forfeited the rights of the land to Israel.

Jephthah makes it clear, that the God of Israel, Yahweh, was victorious over the Amorites.

Jephthah makes the case that it was not even Ammonite land when they took it.

The Amorites, and it can kind of get confusion, but the Amorites are different than the Ammonites.

Remember the Ammonites are descended from Lot and his incestuous relationship with his daughter.

Israel had no quarrels with Ammon their brethren.

But they took the land from the unrelated Amorites.

So the king of Ammon had no claims to the land at all.

And he declares God gave them the land, Yahweh defeated the enemy and disposed them, and he tells them to possess whatever land Chemosh their false god allows them to possess.

Jephthah ends by saying “since God gave us this land, then He will be Judge over who will be victorious in this dispute.”

He is essentially saying that Ammon will be fighting against God.

But in verse 28, the king of Ammon did not heed the message sent by Jephthah.

And the diplomacy is ended, and next we read the cost of having a mixed religion...

Look at verse 29...

Jephthah's Vow and Victory

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. 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 (Or as the Revised Standard Version puts it, whoever) 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."

Jephthah is empowered by God’s Spirit now, and he makes his move toward the people of Ammon.

Now, he had the Spirit upon him, and that is all he needed for victory, but it seems that as soon as he saw the size of the army of Ammon, that doubt set in.

And he resorts to a foolish vow, and understand this is his heathen roots coming forth now.

The other gods of the surrounding region were often bribed by the people.

Jephthah does not fully understand Israel's God, remember the Word of God has been put away, so much of the faith of the Israelites is incomplete.

Jephthah fails to understand that the One True God operates through Grace, and by His Mercy.

There is absolutely nothing Jephthah could do or offer that would attract God's favor.

God is working to deliver Israel, and is using Jephthah in spite of who he is or what he can offer.

Remember this man is a reject, and God has exalted him to this place of leadership.

And as we will see in the coming verses, Jephthah will pay dearly for incorporating pagan beliefs into the Hebrew faith.

Today, the church is not so different to that of this era of Judges, where everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

We see Christians intermingling all kinds of different beliefs with Christianity.

They use Eastern Mysticism in conjunction with our beliefs, they meditate, or some even pray to God, and also look to the stars for answers.

Christians read God's Word, but also look to their horoscope reading every day for more enlightenment.

And today there is this mix bag of beliefs within the church, because God's Word has been shelved, or placed so low on the things that matter in the church.

People today like Jephthah have an incomplete doctrine of Who our God is, and how He operates, they follow dreams with the same authority as God's Word.

And there is such a discontent in the average churchgoer, because they have made their God's voice so confusing by bringing in these false ideas and comingling them with truth.

It creates instability and double-mindedness in God's people.

God's Spirit was all Jephthah needed, but he makes this foolish vow, that whatever comes through his door after the victory will be offered as a burnt offering.

Now, the Law had certain requirements on what could be brought as an offering, but Jephthah does not know this.

It had to be a clean animal, and the wording of Jephthah's vow really makes it clear that he was expecting a human sacrifice, possibly a servant.

This was what the surrounding pagans offered up, and Jephthah seems oblivious that this kind of sacrifice is an abomination to God.

So the battle ensues...

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.

Jephthah advances, and the writer is careful to make it clear that the Lord delivered the victory here to Israel.

Now, it is interesting, that the victory gets only two verses here, and the writer moves quickly into the foolish vow of Jephthah.

Now, I found there to be endless debate on this next section.

And I remember being a very young Christian and hearing pastor Ray teach through this section, and I was so confused and could not understand why this horrible account was in the Bible.

But now I understand, it speaks to the state that Israel was in at this point, they had drifted so far from truth.

Now, I will say that almost all of the earlier commentators accepted the position that in this incident, Jephthah did the unthinkable.

It was not until the Middle Ages that well-meaning and misguided attempts were made to soften down the plain meaning of the text. Leon Morris

And today it is really difficult for our western minds to accept the plain meaning, so many very good endeavors have been made to make this more palatable.

Jephthah's Daughter

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."

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."

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.

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.

And there is significant debate on what or who Jephthah thought would come across the threshold first.

But the grammar suggests he expected to meet a human and not an animal. Note on bottom of page 134 in Tyndale Old Testament Commentary - Mary Evans

And maybe he thought his wife would be the first to come out, and he was counting on that, or maybe he was hoping a servant would come through the door.

But, his precious daughter, his only daughter, came to welcome her daddy home, celebrating the great victory he just took part in.

Jephthah reacts as though the result of this is tragic.

Now, if this man knew the Law of God, if the Word of God was in the place it was supposed to be, he would know that God did not take such an offering.

And he would have known that he could redeem her from the vow, by giving the Lord 10 shekels of silver...

Lev 27:1-2 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them:

'When a man consecrates by a vow certain persons to the Lord, according to your valuation,

Verse 5...

and if from five years old up to twenty years old, then your valuation for a male shall be twenty shekels, and for a female ten shekels

But once again his knowledge is limited, and he is horrified of the consequences of his vow.

And he declares to his daughter that he cannot go back on his vow.

Num. 30:2 If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

So this man, Jephthah is in a quandary.

But we see in Jephthah's daughter a faith like that of Isaac when Abraham was taking him to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him to the Lord, and God provided a ram in the thicket.

She says "So be it, if you have given your word to God, let it be."

But she asks to go bewail her virginity, because it was a cultural shame for a woman not to have any children.

He sent her away to mourn with her friends for two months, and she came back to fulfill her father's vow.

Now again, the great debaters come in, and some suggest, that Jephthah was offering his daughter into the service of God, like a nun, and she would not be able to bear children.

They put stress on her virginity and suggest she is mourning never being able to marry.

They suggest it did not involve death but a dedication. But the reference to the burnt offering in verse 31 is very clear.

What would be the point of going to bewail with friends if she was only being dedicated to the Lord and never to marry?

She would be able to mourn for the rest of her life, but she was not going to live.

And there is a temptation to make this passage more acceptable to our refined culture, but there is no real reason to conclude that the daughter met any other fate than death.

This really speaks to the tragedy of the times that Israel was in, they were in desperate times, and confusing times.

And as we read through the rest of Judges, it will become even more clear that the nation was slipping away from their God, and His Holy Word.

And the consequences were tragic.

This stands as a warning to us today, the church cannot allow the surrounding culture to dictate truth.

We must stand on God's Word, or we too will experience huge tragedy.

We live in a day when Lady Gaga is claiming she knows what True Christianity is, and as she mocks those of us who stand on God's Truth, the culture around us celebrates her words.

And unfortunately many church-goers today will accept Lady Gaga's version of Christianity over what God's Word declares.

Church we must cling to God's Truths today, or we can foolishly fall to the same mistakes as apostate Israel.

Jephthah was a man who started out so well, a man who had the Spirit of God come upon him, yet he was a man who failed to pursue truth fully, and accepted an incomplete faith in God, apart from God's Word.

And instead of being remembered as a great victor, he will have this huge blot on his record.

In Gilead, they even made a four-day holiday to remember this great man's blunder.

But his career does not end here, let's look at chapter 12 now... as the arrogant tribe of Ephraim makes trouble again.

Remember a few chapters ago, Gideon had trouble with this tribe, and Gideon was a little more of a timid

man, remember God found him hiding from the enemy.

And Gideon used flattery to feed this tribes ego.

Jephthah however, is not a coward or a timid man, he is a warrior, and this proud tribe of Ephraim will finally reap what they have sown.

**Prov. 11:2 When pride comes, then comes shame;
But with the humble is wisdom.**

Look at verses 1-3 with me of chapter 12 now...

Jephthah's Conflict with Ephraim

12:1 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!"

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?"

Now, you would think the nation would celebrate their great victory over the Ammonites, and they would get behind their new leader.

But as we have seen with this royal tribe of Ephraim, they were jealous, and they saw themselves continually as leaders of Israel.

They accuse Jephthah of going to war without inviting them, but that does not seem to be the case.

You see the Gileadites were on the east side of the Jordan, Ephraim somewhat protected by the Jordan River.

It seems like Gilead for the 18 years of oppression took the brunt of the Ammonite's hostility.

And Jephthah explains they did call for help, but Ephraim never bothered to come.

But now that victory was gained they were throwing a tantrum that they had no part in it.

They threaten Jephthah here, when they should be thanking him.

So much of the turmoil in the church today comes from inner strife.

1 Cor. 3:3 For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

I remember at the height of the Revival period we had in the youth in Apple Valley, there were amazing things taking place in the youth room.

We were seeing 80-100 kids a night there, and many were coming to Christ.

It was thrilling each week to see what God was going to do, as new faces were coming every time we opened the doors.

But I remember there was this couple, and they were so vicious to Jess and I, and they would inform us often how horrible of a job that we were doing in the youth room

They did not think we were reaching the kids correctly.

We found out later they were going to our youth kids and leaders and cutting them down and us down, they were gossips and yet they used spiritual overtones to sound so spiritual.

But one day, it became clear why the conflict was so great with them.

They came into my office, and the husband began to tell me that God had called him to the church to be the youth pastor, and that I was not the man God called.

You see they wanted me to step down and let them take the youth group over.

Now they were motivated by their carnal desire to be noticed and they envied the position of Jess and I.

And they began to cause divisions and try to even get kids to follow them to their own Bible Study.

Eventually they were frustrated because the kids were not responding to them, or going to their study, that they in an anger left the church.

But you see envy and strife cause division.

Ephraim here should be rejoicing in the great victory, and instead they are complaining that they had no part in the work.

So they pick a fight with Jephthah, and they should have known better.

Jephthah had just released the army, and now he will regather them...

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," 6 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.

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

The Ephraimites clearly saw themselves as superior to other Israelites.

And Jephthah is used by God to humble them.

We see the Ephraimites fled in defeat, and the Gileadites found a quirk in their dialect.

They could not pronounce “shhhiboleth” they said sibboleth.

And the Gileadites decimated the forces of Ephraim, and the effects of this will last for many years.

It definitely seems the writer of Judges wants us to understand the nation of Israel was divided at this point.

Every tribe was looking out for only its own well-being.

They lost the idea of what Israel meant, that they as a whole were governed by God.

How sad and debilitating when the people of God begin to only look out for their own interests, and forget the true calling within the church.

Phil 2:3-4 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

How foolish it is when our different ministries only see themselves as the priority in the church.

When the person or people group forget that they are only a part of the whole body, and the hand wants every decision made to be for the benefit of the hand.

We are all collectively a part of the Body of Christ, and we must strive to maintain the unity of the church.

Eph. 4:1-6... walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Israel lost sight of the collective will of God for them, and the church is just as in danger of doing the same thing.

We cannot think tribally because we are all a part of the Body of Christ.

So we will end with these three obscure minor judges.

Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon

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.

It is thought that he did this to bring the tribes of Israel together in unity, he tried to do so with these inter-tribal marriages.

But nothing else is recorded for us.

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.

We only of Elon's time as a judge and from where he was from.

Next, we read...

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.

This man was focused on his family for sure.

He seemingly made a big scene with them, if you can imagine forty sons and thirty grandsons parading on their donkeys, and how loud that would have been.

Donkey's are about the most noisy and obnoxious sounding animals.

These 70 donkeys would be braying in chorus.

This man Abdon selfishly accumulated to himself wealth, and focused on his family.

He negated his responsibility to the whole nation and tried to build a legacy for himself.

But he falls off the pages of history with none of his sons rising to the occasion.

I see this often in ministry, people negate their responsibility for the sake of their family.

They cop out of their duty to focus on themselves and their household.

Now their most surely is a balance, but mediocracy in our service to God does not benefit our family.

Our sons and daughters would be better off with an example of fulfilling responsibilities, and then they would have a right example to follow when they come into the real world.

I think the generation before me went too far to the extreme of forsaking family for ministry, and they lost the balance.

But I think in our current culture we have swung too far the other way, where our families become idols, and all else falls in behind them.

We plan our worship and service to God around junior's sniffles and ball games.

Our children and grandchildren are taught that God fits in where it is convenient.

They must see the cost and sacrifice that comes from serving the Lord.

They must see our yes be yes, and our no be no, and we cannot allow them to be so spoiled that they become our idols in place of God.

How much better of a lesson is it to tell them, “you are so important to me, but I made a commitment to the Lord, and once I fulfill that, then I will spend time with you.”

Then they can understand something of duty and responsibility.

But we must keep our word to them as well.

This is what is happening in Israel at this point in their history, God is not central, He is simply allowed to fit into the comfortable places, the convenient places, and Israel is becoming complacent and divided in their lukewarm state.

They have lost their passion and zeal in serving their God who delivered them out of Egypt.

Religion is a bother, and they don't want to come off as a bigot in their culture, so they are open minded to the belief's around them.

They have their own Lady Gaga prophets and complacency has set in.

And next week we will meet a judge that just starts off with so much potential, he could have been one of the greatest men of God, but complacency ruins him.

Sampson will excite us, than break our hearts.

I hope you plan on joining us next week as we keep on moving through the Old Testament.

So may the Lord help us this week, to serve Him faithfully, that our commitments to Him would be lived out, and that He would use us in our spheres of influence.

We have the Spirit of God in us, and available to us, may we learn from Jephthah not to rely on anything else but God's Spirit.

Amen?

Let's pray...