Jephthah
Faithful Warrior
Judges 10, 11, 12
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(with a lot of notes from Tim Binder)
Date of Jephthah
1106 BC

- Exodus 1446 BC
  - Solomon reigned from 970-931 BC
  - 4th year of reign is 480 years after the Exodus
    (1 Kings 6:1)
  - $970 - 4 + 480 = 1446$
- Enter Promised Land in 1406 BC after 40 years in the wilderness
- 300 years of occupation (Judges 11:26)
  - $1406 - 300 = 1106$
- Near birth of Samuel
Historical Setting

Judges 10

- Follows faithful Gideon, his wicked son Abimelech, and the rule of Tola and Jair.
- Israel has once again forsook Yahweh and is serving Canaanite gods (10:6)
- Yahweh has sold them into the hands of the Philistines and Ammonites and they have been oppressed for 18 years (10:7-9)
- Israel cries out, yet this time He decides not to save them! He eventually becomes impatient with their misery (10:10-16)
- Ammonites are preparing to attack -- the search for a leader begins.
Jephthah
Judges 11:1-28

- Mighty warrior
- Son of a prostitute
- Driven out by brothers
- Leads gang of “worthless fellows”
- Comes back to fight Ammonites at request of leaders
- First seeks diplomatic solution
  - Recounts historical right to land as a gift of Yahweh.
- Ammonite king does not listen. War imminent.
The Vow

Judges 11:29-40

1. The Spirit comes on Jephthah (11:29)
2. The vow (11:30, 31)
3. Yahweh gives victory and fulfills the condition of the vow (11:32, 33)
4. The price of the vow (11:34, 35)
5. The fulfillment of the vow (11:36-40)
Commentators vs Scripture

- Jephthah’s vow is considered rash, tragic, and even heathen by most commentators.
- Scripture lacks any disapproval of the vow.
- Scripture considers Jephthah a courageous and faithful judge.
  - Jephthah is listed in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11
  - No recorded sin.
The Spirit comes upon Jephthah

Judges 11:29

- Scripture places the coming of the Spirit before the vow.
- Would the Spirit force the utterance of a rash or heathen vow?
  - Prophets speak the word of God when they are controlled by the Spirit.
    - e.g., Balaam cannot speak anything against Israel (Numbers 24).
  - Christ verifies the truth of Psalm 110 by noting that David was “in the Spirit” (Matt 22:43).
- Those who receive the Spirit are not always Godly (e.g., Balaam!), but when controlled by the Spirit they speak the words of God or are empowered to perform His will supernaturally.
The Commitment of the Vow

Judges 11:30, 31

- Climax of Narrative / Defining Event
- Vows as a cry for help
  - Jacob (Gen 28:20-22)
  - Hannah (1 Sam 1:11)
  - Psalm 66:13,14
- Victory not assured for Jephthah
- Condition: Yahweh gives victory over Ammonites
- Result: whatever comes out of Jephthah’s house shall be Yahweh’s, and will be offered up as a burnt offering.
The Commitment of the Vow

Continued...

- What creatures could be subject to sacrifice?
  - **Animal**: house accommodated livestock
    - too trivial a price?
    - what if unclean?
    - what if not male?
  - **Person**: daughter? servant?
The Commitment of the Vow

Continued...

- What action is to be performed on subject of sacrifice?
  - Must human sacrifice be in mind?
    - Hebrew “and” can be interpreted instead with “or”
      - “whatever comes out from the doors of my house ... shall be the LORD’s, or I will offer it up for a burnt offering”
    - if person, then s/he will be devoted to Yahweh
    - if animal, then it will be offered up as burnt offering
    - Jephthah leaves full price in Yahweh’s hands
  - Other possibilities: “burnt offering” had become idiom for “complete devotion?”
The Commitment of the Vow

Continued...

- Yahweh abhors human sacrifice (Deut 12:31; 2 Kings 16:3; Jer 32:35; Psalm 106:34-39)
- Not consistent with Jephthah’s revealed character.
  - Jephthah is not rash as seen with his diplomacy with Ammon and Ephraim
- If human sacrifice in mind, why is scripture silent?
The Fulfillment of God’s Portion

Judges 11:32,33

- Jephthah is victorious over Ammonites.
- Yahweh gives him victory.
- Direct transition from vow to victory.
Cost of Vow

Judges 11:34

- To reader’s surprise, Jephthah’s daughter, his only child, comes out to meet him.
  - She is sing with tambourines -- should have been a time of rejoicing.
- Price of vow is as high as it can be for Jephthah
  - He must give his most precious earthly gift.
- “whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matt 10:37)
Jephthah’s Faithful Heart
Judges 11:35

- Instead of breaking vow, his heart is loyal.
  - Lev 5:4-6 offers an out for rash vows? Not an option here.
  - Like Abraham and Hannah, his actions follow faith (James 2:21)
  - Contrast with Eli who honors sons above God (1 Sam 2:29,30)
- God Himself did not spare His only Son (Rom 8:32)
- Vows to God must be kept (Deut 23:21; Psalm 76:11; Psalm 15:2-4)
Jephthah’s Daughter and the Fulfillment of the Vow

Judges 11:36-40

- Complete compliance of his daughter.
- She will go with her companions to weep for her virginity for two months.
- Jephthah fulfills his vow.
- What happens?