

Judges 11:29-12:7; Gal. 5:13-15; The Rash Judge I. Jephthah's Troubled Beginning II. Jephthah's Family Troubles

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, have you ever spoken only later to regret what you have said?

Once the words leave your mouth, you reconsider but are unable to stop the damage you have done?

Well, today we find Jephthah and his rash words. But there is a deeper problem in our passage- one that is more pressing than simply being quick to speak. Today we find Israel again in the grip of idolatry.

The context found in 10:13-14 reveals that Israel is again plunging forward into this cycle of rebellion.

Again, they had forsaken the Lord- but this time God warned them- I will no more save you! Go and cry

out to the idols you have chosen- maybe they will help you! Yet even in this suffering, God grew weary of their crying. God grew tired of His people being oppressed. Same old sin, and yet God is still patient.

Thankfully our hope does not rest upon our ability to repent, but upon a patient God's compassion! As

far as judges go, we are getting close to the end. We have two more major judges- Jephthah and

Samson left. Israel is starting to self-destruct. It is getting harder to tell the difference between friend

and foe. The enemy is not only out there- it is in my own family. The fact is, people who are

accustomed to mercy sometimes despise it! When we take our salvation for granted, we open

ourselves to bickering and pride. So today we see how the LORD saves Israel- even though her judge is a

rash leader who destroys his own family. Even though Israel starts to kill itself!

### **I. Jephthah's Troubled Beginning**

Our considering of Jephthah starts with a history and heritage. Who is this judge? He is a Gileadite.

Now the title Gilead describes 3 things. The name Gilead describes a mountainous area known for its

perfume on the east side of the Jordan River. Gilead is the name of a family group within the tribe of

Manasseh. And finally, Gilead also happens to be his father's name. So Jephthah, the man of Gilead- is

called a mighty warrior. A strong man with valor- or mighty in battle. But he is also the son of a harlot.

His mother was a prostitute- maybe his dad visited a temple shrine of some other sex trade worker like

Rahab- but Jephthah is not born to Gilead's wife. Because of this, his brothers drive him out. His brothers do not want to share their inheritance with him. Because of no action of his, Jephthah is bearing the consequence of others actions. The father ate the sour grapes, his son's teeth were set on edge. There are similarities found in this conflict and the conflict between Isaac and Ishamael. The son of a slave will not inherit what the son of the free woman has been promised. But in our passage, Jephthah ends up being the one who is chosen to save! This son is abnormally born, despised by his brothers- but in the end becomes their savior! So the one who was first rejected becomes the cornerstone- the one first cast out and despised ends up being the only one who can save them from oppression! A man of sorrows who will become the head and leader of His people! Interesting type here presented. Well, after Jephthah was cast out because of no sin of his, he ends up in Tob- 11:3- which would be close to present day Syria. And a band of mercenaries or pirates end up gathering around him. He is the leader of thieves. The land of Tob- meaning good- ends up being a bad place for him as worthless fellows become his followers. But as war approaches, the elders of his home town have a change of heart. They ask him for help in 11:6. And instead of rejecting the leadership position as Gideon did, Jephthah demands it! I will only come if you make your head- not just a leader- but ruler. Note the irony in this exchange. Jephthah was only wanted back because he could save. It is only when the elders are in trouble that they cry out for a deliverer. We found a parallel to this back in 10:10 an following. The Israelites only cry out for a Savior when they are in trouble. Just as Jephthah said to the elders, so the LORD said- why don't you call upon the ones you chose? Did you not hate me and chose someone else? Just as the elders were doing, Israel only runs to God when conditions are unbearable. They have no real alliance to their mighty deliverer! Again this is human nature- we want someone to save our necks when things are difficult, but when things are good we don't really care! We like the idea of someone who will get us out of jam, but when it comes to submitting our entire life to their rule we tend to balk. So God says- you cast me out. Now go to the gods you chose- maybe they will save you.

And Jephthah says, you hated me and cast me out. Why do you want my help now? But God is going to use this man to bring about victory- to set His undeserving and backsliding people free.

## II. Jephthah's Family Troubles

If you take a bird's eye view of Jephthah's life, you see that it is filled with family troubles. Not only at the beginning- his trouble with siblings and elders of his own city. But even the enemies he goes to battle with. It is hard sometimes to tell who the enemy is? We may choose to be allies with certain people on certain subjects, but on other issues we would have nothing in common! If the enemy of my enemy is my friend- what happens when that common enemy is no longer there? The first battle takes place between the Gideonites and the Ammonites. Remember that the Ammonites were Lot's children. So once again the nephew of Abraham is at war with Abraham's children. The Ammonites wanted the land that the LORD has given to Israel. These battles are taking place on the east side of the Jordan river, where a few tribes have chosen to remain – here in the land of the former kings Sihon and Og. And Jephthah proves through his history lesson, this land was never yours. God gave it to us, and we have been here for 300 years. In his life, this short history lesson and reminder of God's faithfulness is the short high point in Jephthah's life. And this high-water mark is short lived! And he struck them with a great blow- and the Ammonites were subdued- 11:33 says. Yet, even in victory, Jephthah's life is filled with sorrow! God's victory is marred by human blundering. Before he went to battle, Jephthah made a vow- a promise to the LORD. If you will save by my hand, I will sacrifice to you whatever comes out of my door. Now people are divided on what exactly Jephthah expected, but it is instructive that he said- whatever comes out of my door and greets me. So in 11:30 we find a rash vow- a rushed declaration where any person that came out of his house would be offered as a sacrifice. Jephthah's theology concerning works that please God is very faulty. God is not like the god of the nations. Back in 11:24, Jephthah references Chemosh- the god of the Ammonites. It was common for Chemosh and Molech to require human sacrifices for their favor. But God had strictly forbidden in Dt. 12- you shall not offer

your sons and daughters in the fire as the heathens do. And even after Jephthah made this rash vow, there are ways to deal with these rash words. As Lev. 5:5 says, if someone utters a rash oath and when he comes to know it- after he realizes his guilt, he shall confess his sin and bring to the LORD a lamb or goat for a sin offering- and thus the priest shall make atonement for him. But because he is a man of his word, Jephthah keeps his vow and offers his daughter as an offering to the LORD. Note as he says in 11:35, you have brought me very low, you have become a cause of great trouble to me. Jephthah almost blames his daughter for ruining his life- when it was his rash vow that brought this pain. So in 11:39, Jephthah did the thing he promised- offering his only child as a whole burnt offering. But that is not the only family trouble he has. As ch. 12 opens, we find the Ephraimites are angry again. Just as they were back in ch. 8 with Gideon. The men of Ephraim are angry because they were not a part of this battle- and they mean to destroy Jephthah's house and family. The irony is that the very threat in 12: 1 has already been done- Jephthah has already burned his own daughter with fire. What else can Ephraim do? Well, this time the Ephraimites will not be appeased and they go to war with their kin. Now that their common enemy has been defeated, they wage war against a former friend because their pride has been injured! Notice that this is brother against brother- Gilead was a part of the tribe of Manasseh- sharing a border with Ephraim. These are close tribes-neighbors. Yet Israel is going to battle against Israel- in this inhouse conflict some 42,000 men of Israel die. They are slaughter- because they pronounced a word- Shibboleth- incorrectly. This is Jephthah- a man of faith in Heb. 11! A mighty man in Israel who fails to distinguish between friend or foe! Israel is devolving into internal conflict. Forgetting her calling to be a holy nation and to battle against the Canaanites- they kill their own, covenant people. And their leaders- the judges- are turning into mercenaries that kill their own kin. Why is it that the OT church went to battle against itself? Because of pride- because they forgot who they were and who God called them to be! They forgot who the enemy was! But before we think we are so much better than these people- remember what Jesus says to His church repeatedly! Be careful

of strife, envy and bickering. In I Cor. 12- we find the church consuming- attacking itself. Since the church is the one body of Christ, the body was attacking itself with all these factions and strife. Or as we read in Gal. 5:15, if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. The fact is, when we forget who the enemy is, we can easily devolve into bickering and infighting! When we no longer engage principalities and powers, we content ourselves to snipe at our own family members. Israel experienced this in the wilderness, as they grumbled against the LORD and his anointed. Quarrelling against God in Ex. 17! Fighting and arguing- even destruction within the church is nothing new! When we forget our history and our calling, we lose sight of how the battle is to be fought! When we remember that we are still engaged in a spiritual battle, the color of the paint and the texture of the carpet no longer seem as important do they? Only then can we overlook wrongs and seek to support instead of unjustly criticize! When we remember who our mighty Savior is- how He is leading us into battle against the army of darkness- how this life is a battle against sin- then we are less inclined to fight our own family members!

To conclude, speaking the wrong words can bring a whole lot of trouble. Jephthah's rash vow and the Ephraimite's wrong pronunciation brought a whole lot of death in our narrative. Lord, help us to be slow to speak and quick to listen. For without words, an argument is calmed. We note that there is no rest at the end of his life- the land does not have peace in 12:7. These judges are not bringing Shalom but rather bloodshed! So today we saw how the LORD saves Israel- even though her judge is a rash leader who destroys his own family. Praise God that our Mighty Warrior Jesus knows how to fight to save His family and defeat the foe!