

Judges Chapter 11

Verses 1-3

Despite Jephthah's background and his history of "vain men", God turned his situation, which would destroy most people, into a learning opportunity.

The rejection "Jephthah" experienced during times of peace prepared him to be a leader when war was threatening.

Neither bad choices nor the injustices done to a person must ever keep a child of God from completing God's calling.

Judges 11:1 "Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, and he [was] the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah."

"Jephthah" was the ninth judge of Israel, who delivered God's people from 18 years of oppression by the Ammonites.

He was an illegitimate child and was cast out of the family by his half-brothers to prevent him from sharing in the inheritance.

He fled to "the land of Tob" and engaged in clandestine activities with a group of "worthless men".

He was later summoned back to free his people, the Gileadites, from oppression.

He defeated the Ammonites "with a very great slaughter" (verse 33).

Jephthah is well known for his vow involving his daughter (in verse 31).

Later he killed 42,000 Ephraimites when they challenged him for not including them in the battle against the Ammonites.

Jephthah's testimony (in verse 26), strongly favors an early date for the Exodus from Egypt, about 1447 B.C.

He is included (in Hebrews 11:32), for his mighty act of deliverance (Judges 11:1 - 12:7).

"Mighty man":

In a military situation, this means a strong adept warrior, such as Gideon (6:12).

In response to their repentance, God raised up Jephthah to lead the Israelites to freedom from the 18 years of oppression (verse 8).

Gilead was the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh.

Gilead's descendants are called Gileadites.

Jephthah was the son of Gilead and a harlot.

The sons of Gilead by his wife sent him away because of his illegitimacy.

He settled in Tob, which had been where his mother was from.

Tob was in Syria near Gilead.

He made a name for himself as a marauder.

Judges 11:2 "And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou [art] the son of a strange woman."

It seems that, after the birth of Jephthah, Gilead took him a lawful wife, who bore him sons.

"And his wife's sons grew up":

To the estate of men.

"And they thrust out Jephthah":

Out of his father's house, his father in all likelihood being dead, or he would not have allowed it.

And what follows confirms it that he was dead.

"And said unto him,

Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house":

As he might not, if the son of a harlot, or of a woman of another tribe, or of a concubine.

Though as Kimchi, from their Rabbins, observes, the son of such a one might, provided his mother was not a handmaid nor a stranger.

And it looks as if this was not rightly done, but that Jephthah was injuriously dealt with by his brethren, of which he complains.

"For thou art the son of a strange woman":

Or of another "woman", that was not their father's lawful wife.

Or of a woman of another tribe, as the Targum. Or of another nation, as others.

Prostitutes being used to go into foreign countries to get a livelihood, and hide the shame of their families.

Hence a strange woman, and a harlot, signified the same (see Judges 11:1).

Strange here, as in other places in the Bible, means harlot.

It appears the sons were ashamed of him and wanted to get rid of him.

They did not want him getting any of the inheritance of their father.

Judges 11:3 "Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him."

“Went out”:

Such attacks would be against the Ammonites and other pagan peoples and brought fame to Jephthah.

This is speaking of the days when he was a marauder.

His family had rejected him, so he went out to make a name for himself in the only way he knew how.

Judges 11:4 "And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel."

Some time after Jephthah had been expelled from his father's house, and he was become famous for his martial genius, and military exploits.

Or at the close of the eighteen years' oppression of the children of Israel by the Ammonites, or some few days after the children of Israel were gathered together at Mizpeh.

That the people and princes of Gilead were preparing for war with Ammon, and were thinking of a proper person to be their general.

"That the children of Ammon made war against Israel":

Not only passed over Jordan again, and encamped in Gilead, but began to attack them in some place or another.

At least threatened them with it, and made motions towards it.

We read about this in the last chapter.

The reason for the attack of Israel is because Israel had become idolaters and were worshipping false gods.

God had given them into the hands of the children of Ammon.

Verses 5-6 and 11

“Jephthah”, the illegitimate son of Gilead, was called to be the “captain” of the forces and a deliverer of the people who had rejected him.

Though not directly parallel, his story reminds one of Jesus, who was accused of being born of fornication (John 8:41) and who was rejected (compare Acts 4:11), but became the captain of man’s salvation (Heb. 2:10).

Judges 11:5 "And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob:"

They were preparing for it, and had assembled their forces near them.

And had begun to make some efforts against them.

"The elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob":

They did not send messengers to him, but went themselves.

Partly to show greater respect to him, and partly in hopes of better success.

Being aware of objections he would make, which they could better answer themselves than a delegation.

Verses 6-11

The Israelites first rejected God as their leader and then acted on that rejection, asking Jephthah to serve as their “captain”.

For this reason, he is never specifically identified as one whom God appointed to deliver His people (3:9, 15; 4:6-7; 6:14).

Judges 11:6 "And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon."

The general of their army, to conduct and lead on their forces.

They did not propose him to be their king, being convinced by Abimelech's conduct that such a step would be wrong.

Nor did they say anything of his being their judge, having no other view than to serve their present need.

Besides, a judge was not one chosen by the people, but raised up of God, and which honor was conferred on Jephthah afterwards.

"That we may fight with the children of Ammon":

With judgment, courage, and success.

They did not make this proposal to him to save themselves from being engaged in the war, but that they might have one skillful in military affairs at the head of them.

To instruct them in the art of war, and lead them on in a regular manner and encourage them by his brave example.

They suddenly need a man with the strength of Jephthah.

They go to get him to help them out of this predicament they are in.

What an honor for Jephthah, who had been thrown out in disgrace, to come back and lead them as their captain.

Judges 11:7 "And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?"

In answer to their request; who though not backward to engage in the war with them.

Yet thought it proper to take this opportunity to upbraid them with their former unkindness to him.

"Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house?"

For it seems some of these elders at least were his brethren.

For who else could be thought to hate him, and through hatred to thrust him out of his father's house, but the rest of you?

Nor is it at all improbable that they were among the elders of Gilead, considering what family they were of.

Though indeed the magistrates of the city might be assisting to Jephthah's brethren in the expulsion of him.

Or however connived at it, when they should, as he thought, have protected him.

And taken care that he had justice done him. For even though illegitimate, a maintenance was due to him.

"And why are ye come unto me now, when ye are in distress?"

Intimating that it was not love and respect to him, but necessity that brought them to him with this request.

And that since they used him so ill, they could not reasonably expect he should have any regard unto them.

It seems that it was not just his own physical brothers who had expelled him, but the elders of Gilead as well.

He cannot imagine them coming to him now to lead them.

The answer is: they know that he is stronger than they are, and they need a very strong leader.

Judges 11:8 "And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

In reply to his objection:

"Therefore we turn again unto thee now":

Being sensible of the injury they had done him, and repenting of it, of which their return to him was an evidence.

It being with this view to remove the disgrace and dishonor that had been cast upon him, by conferring such honor on him, as to be their chief ruler.

"That thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead":

The end of their coming to him was not only to bring him back with them to his own country, and to fight against the Ammonites, and the defense of it, but to be the sole governor of it.

Not of all Israel, but of the tribes beyond Jordan, which inhabited the land of Gilead.

More than this they could not promise, though he afterwards was judge over all Israel.

Notwithstanding there was a law in Israel, that no spurious person should enter into the congregation, or bear any public office.

So it was a law with the Athenians, that unless a man was born of both parents who were citizens, he should be reckoned fraudulent, and have no share in the government (see Judges 11:2).

There seems to be no one in Gilead with the courage to lead them against these children of Ammon.

They know of his exploits, and know that he is very brave.

This is who they need to lead them.

They are promising to make him the ruler over them, if he will only come and help them now.

Judges 11:9 "And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head?"

Considering the former usage he had met with from them, and the character which he himself bore.

And the fickleness of men, when their turn is served, was willing to make a sure bargain with them.

"If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon":

That is, should he consent to go along with them, and fight their battle for them.

"And the LORD deliver them before me":

Or into his hands, on whom he depended for success, and not on his own courage and valor, and military skill.

"Shall I be your head":

Not only captain general of their forces during the war, but the chief ruler of them when that was ended.

This is a very good question he is asking them.

Do they want him just to fight their battle and then go back to where he came from, or will they allow him to remain their head after the battle?

I like what he said; the LORD deliver them before me.

He is aware that his strength is in the LORD.

Judges 11:10 "And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words."

Assenting to his proposal, and not only giving their word for it, but their oath.

"The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words":

That is, make him head over them.

They appealed to the omniscient God, and called on him to be a witness of their agreement to it, and swore by him they would fulfill it.

Or if they did not, that the LORD would take vengeance on them for it, and punish the breach of this covenant and oath in some way or another.

The Targum of Jonathan is, "the Word of the LORD be a witness between us, etc.".

This is a promise that he will indeed, be ruler over them in peace if he wins the war for them.

They have made a vow with the LORD as their witness.

Judges 11:11 "Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh."

"Uttered all his words ... before the LORD":

Refers to confirming the agreement in a solemn public meeting with prayer invoking God as witness (verse 10).

From the land of Tob into the land of Gilead, his native country.

"And the people made him head and captain over them":

They ratified and confirmed what the elders had promised.

And by a general unanimous vote appointed him both to be the captain of their forces, and to be the chief ruler and governor of them.

And this they did, though he was the son of a harlot.

And according to the law in (Deut. 23:2), such a one was not to be a civil magistrate.

But this was a case of necessity, and in which, no doubt, they were directed by the LORD, who could dispense with his own law.

Besides, they had come to such an agreement before they had pitched on any particular person.

That who should begin to fight with the children of Ammon should be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead so that they were obliged to it by their vote and decree, when they assembled at Mizpeh.

Where it is probable they consulted the LORD, and acted under his direction (Judges 10:17).

And where this was confirmed, as seems from the following clause.

"And Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh":

Where the congregation of Israel were assembled, and in which the Shekinah, or divine Majesty, dwelt.

As is observed by Jarchi and Kimchi, and not Mizpeh in (Joshua 11:3).

As the latter says, but this was on the other side Jordan, in the land of Gilead.

However, as it was a solemn meeting and the LORD was there.

And, as in his presence, Jephthah rehearsed all that passed between him and the elders of Gilead.

And, no doubt, in prayer to God, desired he would signify his approbation and ratification of their agreement, and would give him success in his undertakings against the children of Ammon.

He has been ordained as judge and as their military leader.

Jephthah was installed as their leader in Mizpah.

Their place of worship would have generally been the place for such an ordination.

They are gathered at Mizpah, so this was either in the presence of the arc of the covenant, or where the LORD witnessed it.

Judges 11:12 "And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?"

Being now declared chief and sole governor of the tribes on the other side Jordan, he acted in character.

And as such sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites, to know the reason of his invading the land that belonged to Israel.

Being desirous of adjusting things in an amicable way, and to prevent the shedding of blood.

In which he behaved as a good man, and not at all inconsistent with a man of valor and courage.

"Saying, what hast thou to do with me":

To invade my land, and disturb my people, what have I or they done to give occasion for it?

"That thou art come against me to fight in my land?"

He speaks in the language of a governor, and as a man of spirit concerned for the good of his country, and determined to defend the rights and liberties of it.

Jephthah tries to settle this without a war if possible.

He first wants to know why they have come against Israel.

Judges 11:13 "And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those [lands] again peaceably."

"Israel took away my land":

The Ammonite ruler was claiming rights to the lands occupied by the Israelites.

Jephthah's answer was direct:

- (1) Those lands were not in the possession of Ammonites when Israel took them, but were Amorite lands;
- (2) Israel had been there 300 years in undisputed possession;
- (3) God had chosen to give them the lands and thus they were entitled to them, just as the Ammonites felt they received their lands from their god (compare verse 24).

They are asking for the land back between the Arnon and the Jabbok.

They claim these lands belong to the Ammonites and the Moabites.

Judges 11:14 "And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon:"

Being willing to give him all the satisfaction he could.

And if possible live peaceably with him, and prevent the effusion of blood.

Judges 11:15 "And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon:"

"Israel took not away the land":

These people initiated the hostility, and being at fault, invited loss of possession (verses 16-22).

This fits perfectly the will of God, who has ultimate rights (compare Gen. 1:1; Psalm 24:1), to give the land to Israel.

Judges 11:16 "But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh;"

In order to go to the land of Canaan, which was higher than the land of Egypt, which lay low.

"And walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea":

Which is to be understood not of their walking to it.

When they first came out of Egypt, they indeed then came to the edge of the wilderness of Etham, and so to the Red sea, and walked through it as on dry land, and came into the wilderness of Shur, Sin, and Sinai.

And after their departure from Mount Sinai they came into the wilderness of Paran, in which they were thirty eight years.

And this is the wilderness meant they walked through, and came to Ezion-geber, on the shore of the Red sea (Num. 33:35).

"And came to Kadesh":

Not Kadesh-barnea, from whence the spies were sent.

But Kadesh on the borders of Edom, from whence messengers were sent to the king of it, as follows.

Judges 11:17 "Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken [thereto]. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not [consent]: and Israel abode in Kadesh."

The history of which may be read in (Num. 20:14).

"Saying, let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land":

The land of Edom, from the south to the north of it, according to Jarchi.

Which was the nearest and shortest way to the land of Canaan.

So far were the Israelites from invading and seizing upon the properties of others, that they would not attempt to set their foot in another's country without leave.

Which they asked in a humble manner.

Promising to do no injury to any, but pay for whatever they ate and drank in their passage.

"But the king of Edom would not hearken thereto":

Or grant their request, but refused them passage through his country.

"And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent":

That they should pass through his country, which lay, as Jarchi says, at the end of the land of Edom, to the west of it, and to the south of Canaan.

And though we nowhere else read of their sending messengers to the king of Moab, and of the denial he made them, it is not at all to be doubted.

And the Jewish commentators observe, that it is clearly intimated by Moses (Deut. 2:29).

As the children of Esau, who dwelt in Seir, and the Moabites which dwelt in Ar did unto me.

Which they interpret thus, as the children of Esau would not suffer Israel to pass through their land, when desired of them, so neither would the Moabites, when the same request was made to them.

"And Israel abode in Kadesh":

Quietly and peaceably, and did not attempt to force their way through either country, but continued in Kadesh some little time to consider what way they should take, and to wait for divine direction.

We remember that Israel tried not to offend Moab or Edom.

They tried to cross their land peacefully, and they would not let them.

It is a very dangerous thing to disobey the will of God, and that is what happened in both instances.

Judges 11:18 "Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon [was] the border of Moab."

The wilderness of Paran, which lay along the borders of Edom.

They went, according to Jarchi, from the west to the east on the south border of Edom and Moab.

"And compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab":

All the south of the land of Edom, and all the south of the land of Moab.

Towards the sun rising, as in (Num. 21:11).

"And pitched on the other side of Arnon":

The river Arnon, which, according to Jarchi, was at the east end of the land of Moab, where began the country of Sihon and Og.

"But came not within the border of Moab":

So far were they from attempting to take away any part of that land from the king of it, though ill-treated by him.

"For Arnon was the border of Moab":

Which divided between Moab and the Amorites (Num. 21:13).

He explains, they went a long way out of their way not to cross their land.

Judges 11:19 "And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place."

Which was his royal city, where he had his palace, and kept his court, and is therefore particularly mentioned.

And the rather, because he had taken it from the Moabites, and was part of that land now in dispute.

And this Sihon was not only in possession of, when Israel sent messengers to him, but it was his royal seat.

The metropolis of his kingdom, and he was called king of it.

"And Israel said unto him, let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place":

The land of Canaan, prepared and reserved for them when the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance.

Promised by the LORD to their ancestors and to them, and given unto them, who is sovereign LORD of all.

And all that Israel desired of Sihon was only a passage through his land to that, promising the same as to the king of Edom.

See the history of it in (Num. 21:21).

Judges 11:20 "But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel."

For fear they should seize upon his dominions, and retain them.

And the more fearful he might be, as he knew that his people were one of the seven nations of the Canaanites, whose land they were going to possess, and whom they were to destroy.

"But Sihon gathered all his people together":

In some certain place, and armed them, and went out in a hostile manner against Israel in the wilderness, to attack them.

Whereby it appears that he was the aggressor, and therefore Israel was not to be blamed.

As not for fending themselves, so neither for seizing and possessing his country when they had conquered him.

"And pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel":

There was a battle between them at the place mentioned, and the victory was on Israel's side (see Num. 21:23).

Even this battle was not instigated by Israel.

It was fear from Sihon that caused the battle.

Numbers 21:23 "And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel."

Judges 11:21 "And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country."

So that as Sihon, his people, and his country, fell into the hands of Israel through the victory the LORD gave them over him.

They had a divine right to the land now in dispute.

"And they smote them":

Destroyed him and all his people, as they were ordered to destroy the seven nations of Canaan, of which the Amorites were one (Deut. 7:1).

"So Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country":

By means of the above victory they came into the lawful and rightful possession of all the land that belonged to the Amorites.

Who were at that time, and none else, the inhabitants of it.

And therefore the Ammonites could have no claim to it, nor was any made till now.

Judges 11:22 "And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan."

Peaceably and quietly, nor did any pretend to call their right in question, or dispute their title, or give them any disturbance.

"From Arnon even unto Jabbok":

Which was the length of the country, and the direction was from south to north.

And reached from the river Arnon, the border of Moab, to the river Jabbok, the border of Ammon.

So that it included no part of what was at this time in the possession of either.

"And from the wilderness even unto Jordan":

Which was the breadth of it, and its direction was from the west to the east, reaching from the wilderness of Arabia to the river Jordan.

God punished Sihon and all of the people and gave this land to the Israelites.

God Himself did this.

This is how this land came into the hands of the Israelites.

Judges 11:23 "So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it?"

It is his doing, and not the work of the Israelites.

It is He that dispossessed the Amorites, and put the Israelites into the possession of their land, and therefore they enjoy it by a good tenure.

"And shouldest thou possess it?"

What through the blessing of God on their arms they have obtained by conquest, and he has settled them in.

Did they conquer, that thou should possess what they conquered?

Did their God put it into their hands to deliver it into thine?

Did they fight to recover for thee what thou had lost, and to put thee into the possession of it?

Did not they fight in their own defense, and their enemies and their land fell into their hands, and by the laws and right of nations became theirs?

And canst thou expect to possess it?

What reason is there for it?

This is plainly explained that God gave this land to them.

It is not in their ability to give land to anyone that God has given them, even if they did want to.

It belongs to Israel, because God gave it to them.

Verses 24-28

"Jephthah" defended Israel's taking of the land by saying:

- (1) They did not take it from the Ammonites, as the king of "Ammon" claimed, but from the "Amorites";
- (2) The land had been given to Israel by Israel's God, and Ammon should possess the land given to them by Ammon's god;
- (3) No one had contested Israel's right to his land for 300 years. Perhaps Jephthah's diplomatic argument failed in part because he identified "Chemosh" as Ammon's god when in fact, Chemosh was the god of the Moabites.

Milcom (Molech), was the god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:33).

Judges 11:24 "Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess."

Chemosh was the idol of the Moabites (see Num. 21:29).

Which has led some to think, that the present king of Ammon was also king of Moab.

And who insisted on that part of the country, which formerly belonged to Moab, to be delivered to him, as well as that which had belonged to Ammon.

Now since the land, which they now inhabited, as well as what they had lost, they had taken away from others (Deut. 2:10).

Having conquered them, and which they ascribed to the help and assistance they had from their idol, and possessed as his gift.

Jephthah argues with them with an argument of from the less to the greater.

"So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess":

We have surely as good a claim to what the LORD our God gives to us in a way of conquest, as you have.

Or can think you have, to what your idol, as you suppose, has given you.

However, what we have got, or get this way, we are determined to possess, and keep possession of.

The national god of the Moabites was Chemosh.

They have put their faith and trust in that false god, so they should also look to the false god to acquire land for them.

Israel's God drives their enemies out and gives the land to Israel as an inheritance.

This is a defamation of the false god Chemosh.

Judges 11:25 "And now [art] thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them,"

This argument seems to strengthen the conjecture, that this king was king of Moab at this time.

And so Balak was one of his predecessors.

Now he is asked, whether he thought he was a wiser and more knowing prince than he, as to what was his right and due.

Or whether he had a better claim, or any additional one to the land in dispute the other had not.

Or whether he judged he was more able to regain what belonged to him.

"Did he ever strive against Israel":

For the land they took away from Sihon formerly in the possession of the Moabites?

Did he ever lay any claim to it, or enter into any dispute, or litigate with Israel about it?

Not at all!

"Or did he ever fight against them?"

That is, on that account; no he didn't.

He sent for Balaam to curse Israel, and sought to defend and secure his own country he was in possession of, which he thought was in danger by the Israelites being so near him.

But he never made war with them under any such pretense, that they had done him any injury by inheriting the land they had taken from Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites.

Judges 11:26 "While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that [be] along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover [them] within that time?"

"Three hundred years":

With an early Exodus from Egypt (ca. 1445 B.C.), one can approximate the 480 years covered (in Judges to 1 Kings 6:1, Solomon's fourth year 967-966 B.C.).

38 years from the exodus to Heshbon; 300 from Heshbon to Jephthah in 11:26; possibly 7 more years for Jephthah; 40 for Samson, 20 for Eli, 20 for Samuel, 15-16 beyond Samuel for Saul, 40 for David and 4 for Solomon, which totals about 480 years.

It is quite possible that 300 has been rounded off.

It appears 300 years have passed, and now they are wanting their land back.

Why did not Barak ask for it back earlier?

300 years is a long time to pass before asking for it back.

Judges 11:27 "Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon."

Had done him no injury, not wronged him of anything, nor had taken away any part of his country from him.

This Jephthah said in the name of all Israel, of whom he was governor.

"But thou doest me wrong to war against me":

Meaning that he had no just cause to commence a war against Israel, but acted an injurious part.

And seeing things could not be adjusted in an amicable way, but must be decided by the sword, he leaves the affair with the LORD, and appeals to him.

"The LORD the Judge":

The Judge of the whole earth, the omniscient God that knows all things.

The right and wrong of every cause, on which side truth and justice lie.

"Be Judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon":

Not that he expected a decision of the controversy between them would be made that precise and exact day.

But that from henceforward the LORD would appear, by giving success to that party which was in the right in this contest.

Jephthah declares that he has done no wrong to them.

They are in the wrong.

Then he adds, that the LORD will be the judge of who is wrong.

Judges 11:28 "Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him."

He attended not to the arguments Jephthah made use of, and did not choose to seem at least to be convinced by them.

Nor to regard the awful appeal he had made to the great Jehovah.

He tried to settle this peaceably, and they would not listen to him.

They want to fight.

Verses 29-40

Christian scholars have been divided over whether Jephthah's "vow" dealt with human sacrifice.

Those who favor the view that “Jephthah” actually sacrificed his daughter as a “burnt offering” point to early Jewish and Christian interpreters who held that he did so and maintain that human sacrifice, though not condoned by God, was actually practiced in early Israel (compare 2 Kings 16:3; 17:17; 2 Chron. 33:6; Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 32:35).

However, proper interpretation does not depend merely on historical precedent, nor on instances of the practice of spiritual apostates or unbelievers.

The plain reading of the text favors the view that since Jephthah was yet under the influence of the “Spirit of the LORD” (verses 29-31), when he made his vow, his vow must have dealt with the principle of dedication symbolized by the burnt offering.

Accordingly, Jephthah’s “daughter” was pledged to perpetual “virginity” (verses 37-40).

This view underscores the fact that for God to honor the terms of Jephthah’s vow would make Him a participant in evil inasmuch as He would thereby violate the prohibition in His own revealed word (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut. 12:31-32; 18:10-12).

Since the Scriptures record that Jephthah’s daughter was his only child, and do not indicate that he ever had another, he is rightly commemorated (in Hebrews 11:32-40), not only for his deliverance of Israel but for a full dedication to God that left his home destitute of any heir.

Despite being empowered with the “Spirit of the LORD”, Jephthah failed to trust the power of God and make a rash “vow” in an apparent moment of panic (Deut. 23:22).

Judges 11:29 "Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over [unto] the children of Ammon."

“The Spirit ... came upon Jephthah”:

That the LORD graciously empowered Jephthah for war on behalf of his people does not mean that all of the warrior’s decisions were of God’s wisdom.

The rash vow (verse 30-31), is an example.

This is stating that the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah that he might have the strength of God, to do the job set before him.

He is empowered by the LORD for the job which lies ahead.

Judges 11:30 "And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,"

“Vowed a vow unto the LORD”:

This was a custom among generals to promise the god of their worship something of great value as a reward for that god's giving them victory.

Judges 11:31 "Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

"I will offer it":

Some interpreters reason that Jephthah offered his daughter as a living sacrifice in perpetual virginity.

With this idea (verse 31 is made to mean), "Shall surely be the LORD's" or "I will offer it up for a burnt offering": The view sees only perpetual virginity (in verses 37-40), and rejects his offering a human sacrifice as being against God's revealed will (Deut. 12:31).

On the other hand, since he was:

- (1) Beyond the Jordan;
- (2) Far from the tabernacle;
- (3) A hypocrite in religious devotion;
- (4) Familiar with human sacrifice among other nations;
- (5) Influenced by such superstition; and
- (6) Wanting victory badly, he likely meant a burnt offering.

The translation in verse 31 is "and", not "or".

His act came in an era of bizarre things, even inconsistency by leaders whom God otherwise empowered (compare Gideon in 8:27).

This was a very foolish vow to make to God.

A vow is not something you can take back.

It is a permanent agreement to God.

His mother's people were Syrians, and they practiced human sacrifice.

God did not require human sacrifice however.

This I will not comment on.

I do not know why he made such a rash vow.

Judges 11:32 "So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands."

As in (Judges 11:29), after he had made the above vow.

"And the LORD delivered them into his hands":

When both armies met and engaged, victory was on the side of Jephthah.

The LORD being with him, and giving him success, to where all is justly ascribed.

Judges 11:33 "And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, [even] twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel."

A city which lay near the river Arnon, on the borders of Moab (Deut. 3:12).

"Even till thou come to Minnith":

Which seems to have been a place famous for wheat (Ezek. 27:17).

So David de Pomis says it was a place where the best wheat grew.

Jerom says in his time was shown a village called Minnith, four miles from Heshbon, as you go to Philadelphia.

Josephus calls it Maniathe, and it is thought by some to be the Anitha of Ptolemy, which he places in Arabia Petraea even "twenty cities"; which he pursued them through and took.

"And unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter":

He met and engaged them at Aroer, a town in the tribe of Gad, upon the Arnon.

A decisive victory crowned the arms of Israel, and the pursuit was continued to Abel (plain of the vineyards), from south to north, over an extent of about sixty miles.

"Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel":

So that they were not able to oppress them anymore.

It was not difficult to win this war. God was with him.

He had empowered him with His Spirit, that he might be successful.

The children of Ammon had no chance at all.

They were fighting against God as well as the Israelites.

They were defeated.

Judges 11:34 "And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she [was his] only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter."

“His daughter came out to meet him”:

She was thus to be the sacrificial pledge.

This pain has to be similar to the pain that Abraham had, when he was told to sacrifice Isaac.

The love that a parent has for a child is one of protection, not hurt.

The love for an only child is even greater.

He had never dreamed when he vowed, that it would be his daughter who would come out of his house first.

This means He will never have grandchildren.

This is his only child.

Judges 11:35 "And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back."

Before this, I was troubled by my brethren.

And since, by the Ammonites.

And now most of all, though but occasionally, by thee.

I have opened my mouth, i.e. I have vowed, which was done by words (Num. 30:2, 6).

"I cannot go back”:

I.e., not retract my vow.

I am indispensably obliged to perform it.

The tearing of his clothes was a sign of extreme mourning.

The fact that he must sacrifice his only daughter has bowed him very low.

His grief is overwhelming.

He had promised God and he cannot go back on the vow he made.

Now he wishes he had not opened his mouth and made this rash vow, but it is too late.

Judges 11:36 "And she said unto him, My father, [if] thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, [even] of the children of Ammon."

The conditional word "if" may be left out, as it is not in the original text.

For her father had told her that he had opened his mouth, or made a vow to the LORD.

And had no doubt explained it to her what it was, though it is not expressed.

She knew it respected her, as it had issued.

And was concerning her, as appears by her later request.

"Do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth":

Which is a remarkable instance of respectful subjection and obedience to a parent.

And which perhaps was strengthened by a like mistaken notion as that of her father concerning the vow.

That it could not be dispensed with.

And therefore was moved under a sense of religion, as well as filial duty, to express herself in this manner, as well as by what follows.

"Forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon"

Such was her public spirit, and the grateful sense she had of the divine goodness.

In giving victory over Israel's enemies, and delivering them from them.

With vengeance on them, she cared not what was done to her.

Yea, desired that what was vowed might be performed.

She does not try to beg her father not to do this.

She knows the seriousness of vowing to God.

God had kept his part of the agreement.

Now her father must keep his.

Judges 11:37 "And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows."

She had but one favor to ask of him, which she thought might be granted, without any breach of the vow.

"Let me alone two months she desired such a space of time might be allowed her before the vow took place.

And the rather she might be encouraged to expect that her request would be granted, since no time was fixed by the vow for the accomplishment of it.

And since the time she asked was not very long, and the end to be answered not unreasonable.

"That I may go up and down upon the mountains":

Or "ascend upon the mountains";

Jephthah's house in Mizpeh being higher than the mountains.

"And bewail my virginity, I and my fellows":

The virgins were her companions.

This she proposed to be the subject that she and her associates would dwell upon, during this time of solitude.

And the rather, as this may be thought to be the thing contained in the vow, that as she was a virgin, so she should continue.

By which means she would not be the happy instrument of increasing the number of the children of Israel, nor of being the progenitor of the Messiah.

Upon which accounts it was reckoned in those times to be very grievous and reproachful to live and die without issue, and so matter of lamentation and weeping.

The Hebrew women thought it a curse from God not to have children.

The saddest part of this for his daughter, was the fact that she had never been married.

She must have been young, because they married early at that time.

This two months would be a time of regret for her.

She would spend these days with her friends.

Judges 11:38 "And he said, Go. And he sent her away [for] two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains."

He granted her request at once.

"And he sent her away for two months":

As she desired.

"She went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains":

For the space of two months.

He granted her wish.

She and her friends went to the mountains for two months.

Their sadness was not over her death but the fact that she would leave no children.

Judges 11:39 "And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her [according] to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,"

Sadly, Jephthah did not understand that while vows must not be broken (Num. 30:1-2; Deut. 23:21-23; Psalm 56:12).

God did provide for the redemption of thoughtless, careless vows (Lev. 5:4-6).

How exactly did Jephthah fulfill his vow?

Some scholars content that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter as a burnt offering (11:30-31); others argue that he confined his daughter to perpetual virginity.

Her father reluctantly carried out the vow he had made to God.

There are several things in this particular verse that make many believe he might not have killed her.

It would have been worse than death to a Hebrew woman, if she could never marry and have children.

Notice, in the verse above, "she knew no man".

She was a virgin, and had never been with a man.

Whether he actually killed his only daughter or whether she was never allowed to marry would have been death as far as she was concerned.

I will not presume to guess whether she was actually killed, or whether she was never allowed to marry.

We do know that Isaac was not actually sacrificed, but it was as if he were, because Abraham offered him to God.

I cannot say what the case here is.

I leave it up to you.

Judges 11:40 "[That] the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year."

Went yearly, to a place appointed for their meeting to this end.

"To lament the daughter of Jephthah":

To express their sorrow for her loss, according to their manner.

"The daughter of Jephthah":

To celebrate her praises, who had so willingly yielded up herself for a sacrifice.

Israel benefited from her sacrifice, so they were the ones who went 4 days a year to remember her great sacrifice for all of their families.

This was probably done just in Gilead, where what she had done was well known.

Chapter 11 Questions

1. Now, _____, the Gileadite, was a mighty man of valor.
2. He was the son of Gilead and a _____.
3. Gilead was the son of Machir, the son of _____.
4. Gilead's wife's sons _____ Jephthah out.

5. Jephthah fled from his brothers, and dwelt where?
6. When did the elders of Israel go after Jephthah, to bring him back?
7. What did they ask Jephthah to do?
8. What does Jephthah say to the elders?
9. Why did they come to get him to lead them?
10. Before he comes with them, what does he make them promise?
11. The elders made their vow to Jephthah in front of _____.
12. What did Jephthah know about his strength?
13. Where was he ordained?
14. What positions would he hold?
15. What did he do first, before going to war?
16. What question does he ask the king of the children of Ammon?
17. How does the king answer him?
18. What does Jephthah relate to them about the Israelites crossing over their land?
19. What attitude did they have toward Israel?
20. What king came out and fought the Israelites?
21. What was the outcome?
22. What did God do with Sihon's land?
23. Who was the national god of the Moabites?
24. What does Jephthah challenge their false god to do?
25. How many years have passed, since this land belonged to them?
26. Who would judge between them?
27. What empowered Jephthah?
28. What rash vow did he make to God?
29. Why was it not difficult to win the war?

30. Who came out to meet him, when Jephthah came home?
31. What did he do, when he saw who it was?
32. What did she ask for?
33. Who went with her?
34. What was her sadness for, if not that she might lose her life?
35. Did he kill his only daughter?
36. Who commemorates her sacrifice?
37. Why do they commemorate her sacrifice?
38. How many days a year does this take?
39. How do we know this is not for everyone to do?
40. Where was, probably, the place this was done?