

Judges 11B

- When we last saw our latest judge, Jephthah, he was trying to negotiate with the king of Ammon over who had right to the land east of the Jordan River
 - Jephthah you remember is the son of a harlot, a man rejected by the rest of his family
 - Until they needed his help to defeat the Ammonites
 - Ammon is the nation bordering Israel on the east, about 13 miles east of the Jordan River
 - They had begun to crush the Israelites in Gilead and threatened to invade further west
 - So Jephthah tried to avoid war with Israel's neighbor by lecturing the king on who was the rightful owner of the land
 - He made good arguments, and his rhetoric was top notch
 - But his plan was doomed to fail
 - Because he was working against the Lord's desires
 - The Lord had brought the Ammonites up against Israel as a punishment for their sins under the Old Covenant
 - Now that the cycle of punishment was about to give way to deliverance, the Lord raised up Jephthah to defeat the enemy
 - He didn't want a negotiator
 - He didn't ask Jephthah to make friends with Ammon
 - He wants a captain to lead an army as past Judges have done
 - So as we read last time, the king cared nothing for Jephthah's logic

Judg. 11:28 But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him.

- War seems inevitable at this point
- Which is the way the Lord wanted it

- There's certainly a time to for God's people to seek peace with our neighbors in the word
 - But when the Lord has declared to His people that peace isn't His goal, then we can't substitute our desires for His
 - Because there are times when conflict and even war suit God's good purposes better than peace and acquiescence
 - In the end, we are called to obey God's will, not second guess His instructions
- So now that Jephthah's plan has failed, it's time for the Lord's plan to go into action

Judg. 11:29 Now the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon.

Judg. 11:30 Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, "If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand,

Judg. 11:31 then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

- The Lord brings His Spirit upon Jephthah
 - The Spirit's power and direction is responsible for the sequence of events that follows
 - This tells us that the Lord is working to create the outcome
 - Specifically, the Spirit is said to come upon Jephthah
 - This suggests the Spirit was not already working with the judge
 - This reference and others like it in the Old Testament demonstrate that the work of the Spirit in this time didn't involve a permanent indwelling
 - The Spirit came upon an individual for a time and for a purpose
 - Later, He would depart as God determined
 - That departure wasn't an indication that the Spirit disapproves of the person
 - Or that the person was no longer a child of God saved by faith

- The ministry of the Spirit in this day was different than we know Him to work in the Church age
 - In the days prior to the New Covenant, the Spirit was still the instrument of faith, but His ministry didn't include a permanent indwelling
 - Today, the Spirit comes to permanently indwell the children of God at the moment of faith
 - The Spirit is the seal of faith and the proof of salvation for every NT believer
 - That's why we say the Church stands apart from the rest of the saints of God
- In this moment, the effect of the Spirit's arrival upon Jephthah was to fill the judge with bold courage and clear understanding of God's desires
 - The Spirit leads Jephthah north along the border between Gad and Manasseh in the Jordan river valley
 - He's recruiting an army to battle
 - And when he's got the forces he requires, he returns to Mizpah of Gilead, which was on the border on Ammon
- At this point, Jephthah is ready to go to battle, but his negotiator nature comes back
 - We remember that his name means "he opens" as in he opens his mouth too often and too easily
 - And here's one of those times he makes that mistake
 - The Lord has given him all that he needs for success in the battle
 - All that's required at this point is to move forward in the battle
 - But Jephthah isn't content to rest in the Lord's Spirit nor in the confidence of the Lord's strength
 - Jephthah want's additional assurance so he decides to make a vow
- Before we consider this vow, let's understand how the Lord sees vows in general

[Num. 30:1](#) Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the word which the Lord has commanded.

[Num. 30:2](#) "If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

- Under the Law, Israel was obligated to keep any vow they made to the Lord
 - To fail to keep a vow meant that the Lord would require a penalty from the one who vows
 - In fact, the penalty for failure to keep a vow was to suffer a similar payment as the one requested
- Considering the way the Lord viewed vows, a Jew was encouraged to think carefully before making any vow
 - In fact, the Lord warned the people not to make vows at all considering the risks involved

[Deut. 23:21](#) "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you.

[Deut. 23:22](#) "However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you.

[Deut. 23:23](#) "You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised.

- The Lord explains that vows are binding and the Lord will see them through one way or another
- Therefore, it would be better to refrain from making vows
- In fact, you can never sin by avoiding vows
- That's why in the New Testament, Jesus says don't make vows at all, but simply to act in a trustworthy and reliable way in all dealings

[Matt. 5:33](#) "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.'

[Matt. 5:34](#) "But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

[Matt. 5:35](#) or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

[Matt. 5:36](#) “Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

[Matt. 5:37](#) “But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.

- Jesus explains that making promises by swearing vows to God is evil
 - It’s evil because in the end our sinful hearts will lead us to promise things we can’t or shouldn’t do
 - Or we will be tempted to go back on our word when things don’t turn out the way we want and compromise our word to God
 - Either way, evil will be the outcome, so don’t make a vow
- Unfortunately, Jephthah doesn’t seem to know either God’s word or the heart of God
 - He has missed the warnings about making rash vows, and in this case he makes probably the most ill-advised vow in all scripture
 - He declares that he is prepared to kill something or someone without considering who that might be
 - Maybe he assumes the first out of the tent will be an animal or a slave
 - Nevertheless, his mouth is getting him into serious trouble
 - In this case, Jephthah vows that if the Lord will give him victory over Ammon, he will sacrifice to the Lord whatever comes out of his tent to meet him upon his return
 - This vow is quite odd, since animals weren’t typically found inside the tents though they might wander in on occasion
 - It’s more likely that a person might be first out of the tent
 - So, Jephthah is essentially promising to sacrifice either an animal or human being to the Lord
- What caused him to say such a thing? Probably a combination of an impulsive nature and a complete misunderstanding of God
 - His vow suggests he views Yahweh in the same way pagan’s viewed their gods

- Pagan gods were capricious, unpredictable, uncaring and demanding
- Pagan gods demanded human sacrifice from time to time
- And they had to be appeased before the worshipper could expect payback
- The Living God is also demanding of righteousness and obedience
 - But He is not uncaring or cruel
 - Nor does He dispense His mercy on a transactional basis
 - His mercy is found through faith alone in the word of God
 - And He does not delight in human sacrifice
- At the root of Jephthah's flawed thinking was the expectation that he can negotiate with God in the same way he tried to negotiate with the king of Ammon
 - Scripture makes clear that God doesn't negotiate
 - Even when He appears to entertain offers like that of Abraham interceding for Lot or Moses interceding for Israel, He still does as He planned in the end
 - He invites us into such conversations so that he can mold our thinking and show us His will
 - But He isn't looking for advice nor is He open to suggestions
 - Be careful about turning prayer into a negotiation, making deals and making vows to God
 - Negotiating with God is just another way of trying to work our own plan instead of yielding to His
 - Jephthah had already been given the Spirit of God Who had revealed God's purposes and equipped Him to succeed in battle
 - But Jephthah didn't rest in that...he still needed to feel he was in control of his circumstances and could force a certain outcome
 - While we aren't under the Law of Moses, God still expects us to operate in faith and trust by His Spirit
- Having made his vow, the die is cast for Jephthah, and with that he goes to war

Judg. 11:32 So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the Lord gave them into his hand.

Judg. 11:33 He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel.

- Notice the Lord makes no comment regarding the vow
 - There was no need for a response, for the Lord wasn't bargaining with Jephthah
 - The Lord had his plan, and His Spirit will move it forward with or without the vow
 - That's the problem with vows...they don't obligate the Lord
 - They only obligate us
 - The Lord may choose to answer in the affirmative or the negative to our request
 - But we are obligated either way...not a good deal for us
 - In this case, the Lord always intended to grant a victory, and so when Jephthah crosses over into Ammonite territory, the Lord is with Israel
 - The army of Jephthah chase the Ammonites from place to place
 - In the process, they destroy twenty cities in a great slaughter
 - As a result, the people of Ammon cease to oppress the people of Israel
- God has delivered His people as He promised in His word, but because of Jephthah's mouth, our focus moves from the Lord to Jephthah's vow

Judg. 11:34 When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had no son or daughter.

Judg. 11:35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot take it back."

- As we feared, the first out of the tent upon his return was a person, his daughter and his only child

- Based on Jephthah's vow, he was now obligated to sacrifice his daughter to the Lord, or so he thought
 - He takes one look at her and goes into mourning knowing what must follow
 - He declares that he has given his word to God and cannot take it back
 - This is true in the sense that you can't make a vow with your fingers crossed
 - The vow stands
- Obviously, we see the foolishness of Jephthah's vow clearly now
 - He promised something that depended on a certain future outcome
 - Yet he lacked the ability to control the future
 - So he was making commitments without knowing the future
 - How much better is it to simply rely on the Lord's word, since we know He can see into the future
- Jephthah's ignorance of God and of the word of God has placed him in this position
 - And ironically, his ignorance is also responsible for leading him to go through with his vow
 - Because Jephthah doesn't know or didn't remember that the law of God made provision for situations like this
 - In Leviticus, the Lord told Israel that they could escape from keeping their vow if they paid a ransom instead

[Lev. 27:1](#) Again, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

[Lev. 27:2](#) "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When a man makes a difficult vow, he shall be valued according to your valuation of persons belonging to the Lord.

[Lev. 27:3](#) 'If your valuation is of the male from twenty years even to sixty years old, then your valuation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary.

[Lev. 27:4](#) 'Or if it is a female, then your valuation shall be thirty shekels.

- All Jephthah needed to do was pay this ransom and he could have avoided sacrificing his daughter

- As we said before, the Lord has no interest in seeing a human being sacrificed
- And in fact, He doesn't receive such an offering
- He expects that the vow be met with a ransom payment
- But remember, the mistake here was Jephthah's, not the Lord
 - Jephthah made the vow, not the Lord
 - And he doesn't have to carry through with it if he pays the ransom
 - But since he doesn't know the word of the Lord, he thinks his only choice is to either kill his daughter or be killed himself
 - And although she is innocent, he's not willing to die in place of his daughter
- Once the daughter learns what her father vowed, she responds with faith in the Lord

Judg. 11:36 So she said to him, "My father, you have given your word to the Lord; do to me as you have said, since the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon."

Judg. 11:37 She said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions."

Judg. 11:38 Then he said, "Go." So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity.

Judg. 11:39 At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel,

Judg. 11:40 that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

- She willingly agrees to die in accordance with the vow
 - She is more concerned with honoring the Lord than with her own life
 - But before the sentence will be carried out, she asks that she may have a 2 month delay to mourn her virginity

- She means she is mourning the fact that she will never marry or have children
- Jephthah's daughter is perhaps the most Christ-like character we will find in the entire book of Judges
 - She is a person dedicated to trusting the Lord and serving no matter the personal consequences
 - She does so at great personal sacrifice
 - And she remains pure in her devotion
 - We're told she remains a virgin, which means she doesn't seek for earthly pleasures at the risk of her virtue
 - And after her two months of mourning, she dutifully returns to submit to the will of the Father
 - As a result, the people of Israel commemorated her personal faithfulness with an annual observance of her sacrifice
- Now once more, there is no indication from scripture that the Lord desires that this happen or that he is pleased when it does
 - The entire story is told to reveal the evil and ignorant heart of this judge
 - Her death wasn't required by the Lord
 - But the daughter's obedience to her father was out of love for the Lord and was commendable
 - In the end her death was a testimony to Jephthah's sin and ignorance and to his daughter's piety

"Although the present story ends with the death of the young girl, her father is the tragic figure, presenting a pathetic picture of stupidity, brutality, ambition, and self-centeredness. Ironically, the one who appeared to have become master of his own fate has become a victim of his own rash word..." -Block

- But if we're making conclusions about the Lord, then don't place any of this at His feet
 - The Lord is notably silent through the entire story
 - It indicates to us that He's not playing a part in these circumstances

- He's just as saddened by it as we are, and the story was preserved so we might see the deterioration of Israel's leaders
- Finally, we're also observing the beginning of a steep decline in the condition of women in the culture
 - Earlier in Judges we noted that men had stepped back from their appointed role as leaders in the family and nation
 - Women stepped forward to fill the vacuum, which was to their credit
 - But the fact that women had to rule and lead was an indictment against the men
 - And the effect of a weak men is a weak society overall
 - And the past 250 years of history confirms the dangers of a culture of weak men
 - Ironically, now we're seeing the final stages of that decline
 - When the men become spiritually weak and unfamiliar with the Lord, eventually the women will suffer too
 - Instead of leading men out of darkness, women become victims of that darkness
 - Here we find a father vowing to kill whoever walks out of his tent, knowing that tents were generally occupied by women
 - Going forward from this point in the book, we see a rapid decline in the fortunes of women in the story of Judges
 - A woman will be raped, killed and dismembered
 - 400 young women from one city will be abducted
 - And another group will be kidnapped from Shiloh
- If weak men can be one measure of a deteriorating culture, than the neglect, abuse and exploitation of women is another
 - And one is usually the product of the other
 - Both are an indication that the Lord is preparing to step in and judge the culture that abuses His mercy in these ways

- We know that the Lord will act again in Israel, because that's the pattern of this book
- And we can also be sure that the Lord is preparing to move in our world too
- But in both cases, the Lord's response isn't immediate
 - He has a plan and a timing all His own
 - But the Lord isn't slow about His promises
- While we await the Lord's return, we serve Him by learning the lessons of scripture, instead of forgetting God's word like Jephthah
 - And we obey without negotiating
 - We resist taking matters into our own hands
 - Men lead in their homes and in the church body, while women serve by their side, submitted to the will of God
 - We lean on the Spirit and the counsel of the word
 - And we live sacrificially knowing that the Lord is prepared to make good things come from our obedience