

Judges & Ruth

God's *Faithfulness* Remains

women's | BIBLE STUDY

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LESSON *Nine*

Jephthah

Chapter 10 introduces Jephthah, an unlikely leader called to help Israel against their new enemy, the Ammonites. While on his way to battle, Jephthah made a rash vow to God, resulting in grim consequences for his family. After a victorious battle, he found himself in a bloody conflict with Ephraim, another tribe in Israel. It is there that Jephthah lost his life after judging Israel for 6 years.

Read Judges 10:17-12:15 before answering the following questions.

1. Consider where Israel started back in Judges 1. How had the nation strayed from God since the beginning of this story? How had God remained faithful?
2. Because this lesson focuses on a longer section of Scripture, it can be easy to get lost in the details. As you begin, fill out the chart below with some of the big picture facts:

MAP

Turn to the map on page 11 to see the location of Gilead, Ammon, Mizpah, and Tob.

<p>Who was Jephthah?</p>	
<p>In what ways was he successful?</p>	
<p>Where did he fail?</p>	
<p>How did the story end?</p>	

Read Judges 10:17-11:28.

3. Israel found themselves in trouble with yet another enemy: the Ammonites. What was their solution? Why is this answer surprising?
4. Jephthah's family rejected and forgot him. However, they called out to Jephthah in their moment of need. Notice how this reflects Israel's relationship with God throughout the book of Judges. Do you ever "forget" God until you need help? When recently has God been your "plan B"?
5. The king of Ammon tried to take the land of Gilead. Jephthah tried to seek a peaceful solution before going to war. In a couple of sentences, explain Jephthah's argument against the Ammonites in verses 14-22.
6. How did Jephthah describe God in verses 23-28? How do these descriptions speak to the book of Judges and the whole of Scripture? (For help, see Psalm 75:7, Psalm 96:13, 2 Timothy 4:8, and James 4:12.)

Read Judges 11:29-40.

7. What vow did Jephthah make to God in verses 29-31? What happened when Jephthah returned home?

CONTEXT

For greater context on Israel's history with the land Ammon claimed was rightfully theirs, read Numbers 20-21 and Deuteronomy 2.

MOAB

Notice the mention of "Moab" in this text. Moab was Ruth's country, a character you will learn more about later in this study.

VOW

Although Jephthah knew enough of God's Word to explain Israel's history, his actions in this passage demonstrated he did not know God's character. Similar to that of the cultic worshipers around him, Jephthah made a vow that serves as the strongest evidence of his ignorance.

SYNCRETISM

At this point in the book, you can begin to see great syncretism among the Israelites. Syncretism is the combination of several belief systems into one. In this case, Israel's worship of God was meshed with the Canaanite worship of their foreign gods, and the result had dire consequences.

SILENCE

The words “whoever comes out” might indicate that Jephthah’s vow could allow for either human or animal sacrifice. Regardless, God is silent to his proposal.

JEPHTHAH’S DAUGHTER

There are two primary interpretations of what happened with Jephthah’s daughter. First, Jephthah sacrificed her as a burnt offering, just as he said. Second, she was metaphorically sacrificed to the service of God in that she was not allowed to marry or have children.

BREAKING VOWS

According to God’s Word, breaking a vow was a sin (Numbers 30:2). However, God’s Word also makes allowance for breaking vows as necessary (Leviticus 27; 1 Samuel 14:24-46).

EPHRAIM

Ephraim is one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

SHIBBOLETH

From the exchange in 12:5-6 around the word “Shibboleth,” it is evident that there were differences in the regions’ accents. To discover whether the fugitives were from Ephraim, the men from Gilead were testing them based on a word the tribes pronounced differently.⁵⁵

8. Read Leviticus 20:2-5, Deuteronomy 12:31, and Deuteronomy 18:9-10. Considering these passages, what did Jephthah’s fulfillment of his vow reveal about his heart and belief in God?

9. It appears that Jephthah was attempting to manipulate God. While you might not be in the same circumstances, you can be tempted to do the same. When have you tried to move God’s hand in your favor? How is this a misunderstanding of God’s character?

Read Judges 12:1-15.

10. Conflict had surfaced between Jephthah and the Ephraimites (another Israelite tribe). How was the conflict handled? Do you think the actions of both sides were just?

11. Ephraim felt overlooked and left out, leading to great division among God’s people. Similarly, there are issues that divide the Church today. What are the consequences to the body of Christ because of these divisions? (See 1 Corinthians 1:10 and Ephesians 4:1-7.) (See Appendix: Unity.)

12. Looking back over the passage, where do you see God in Judges 10:17-12:15?

13. Jephthah acted as though he did not know God and instead did whatever was right in his own eyes. As you saw in this passage, it deeply affected his life. What steps can you take toward knowing God's character and His Word better?

“Sometimes God’s way of making us hungry for His presence is to give us a taste of His absence.”

– *Kenneth Way*⁵⁶

MINOR JUDGES

In Judges 12:8-15, the author announced several of the minor judges of Israel, including Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. They are only called “minor” because there is little information about their time judging Israel.

MAN OF FAITH?

Though it's surprising, Jephthah is included in Hebrews 11:32 as a man who acted by faith in God. To understand why, you must understand the purpose of each book. Judges has a negative objective, highlighting the flaws of its characters to emphasize sin and rebellion. On the other hand, Hebrews 11 has a positive objective, meaning “the author selectively includes only the positive details from people who had imperfect faith.”⁵⁷

BIG IDEA

What is your biggest takeaway from this week's lesson?

OPTIONAL REVIEW: Judges 1-12

CYCLE

Over and over again in Judges, Israel repeated this cycle: Sin, Slavery, Supplication, Salvation, and Silence. Keep this in mind as you review.

In the book of Judges, everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Israel consistently and blatantly disregarded God and His instructions, becoming like the foreign people in the land. Israel then entered into a distinct cycle of sin. Israel disobeyed and, because God is just, He allowed them to experience discipline by giving them over to their enemies. In His kindness, however, God listened to the cries of His people and raised judges (military and political leaders) to save the nation. At the end of the cycle, God was silent. By this point in the book, we have seen this cycle repeated several times under leaders like Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, and Abimelech. All felt hopeless, and yet, there was still hope. Though Israel was faithless God remains faithful.

Review Judges 1-12 before answering the following questions.

1. Read Joshua 24:14-31 and look back through Judges 1. Where did Israel start and how were they doing halfway through the book? When you think about Israel's decline and poor treatment of God, how do you feel?

2. What are some of the big mistakes Israel made? What are some of the consequences they experienced? (Use Scripture references.)

3. What stands out to you about each of the major Judges:

Othniel

Ehud

Deborah

Gideon

Jephthah

4. What aspects of God's character have you seen most clearly over the first half of this study?

5. In what specific ways have you related to Israel throughout this study?

6. What encourages you the most in the first half of Judges? What challenges you the most?

7. Review your big ideas and teaching notes. What are the major lessons God has taught you through the book of Judges?

8. Now, take some time to write a prayer to God using the prompts below. Pray for your relationship with God, the rest of this study, and anything else on your heart.

Adoration: Praise God for who He is. Worship Him for the many aspects of His character.

Confession: Come to God broken. Consider where you fall short, where you have missed His standard for you, and tell Him these things.

Thanksgiving: Praise God for what He has done. Think about the many gifts He has given you, your family, His church, and the world.

Supplication: Present your requests to God, whether they are for you or someone else.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Psalm 119:11 refers to knowing God's Word so that we might not sin against Him. In response, challenge yourself to memorize a verse from Scripture that reminds you of God's faithful character this week.

Notes