

# JEPHTHAH

## JUDGES 10-12

Today we come to the eighth judge for Israel—Jephthah. In your group, who can name the most number of judges—in order?!



Eight judges means there are have been eight cycles of: 1. Israel turns their back on God and commits idolatry, 2.. Israel is overrun by foreign oppressors; 3. Israel cries out to the Lord for help; 4. The Lord raises up a judge to save them; 5. Israel is saved and is devoted to the Lord throughout the lifetime of that judge; 6. The judge dies and Israel turns their back on God and commits idolatry.

**Read Judges 10:6-16**

1. What is God's response to Israel's cry for help?
2. What is God getting sick of?
3. How genuine do you think Israel's repentance is?

God is sick of being called on to rescue the Israelites when they're always serving other gods. If they want to be rescued they can go and ask their idols for help! The Israelites protest and get rid of their idols, but in light of their previous record it sounds a bit shallow. Even so, it's like God cannot help himself—"he could bear Israel's misery no longer." (v16). God relents and has pity on them.

**Read Judges 11:1-11**

4. What is your initial impression of Jephthah?
5. What differences are there between the way Jephthah's appointed and the way the other Judges have been appointed?

In fact there are many similarities between Jephthah and Abimelech (8:29-9:6), the son of Gideon who conspired to become the king of Israel. Both were born as illegitimate children, both have conflict with their father's legitimate sons, and both have a band of 'worthless men' who followed them. Abimelech was a complete disaster. We'll have to see if Jephthah fairs any better.

6. What do you think of the bargain Jephthah makes with the elders of Gilead? How would you rate his negotiation skills?

### **Read Judges 11:12-28**

7. What's impressive about Jephthah's speech to the king of Ammon?

8. There may have been eight judges so far, but who has been the Judge all along according to Jephthah, v27?

9. Given what we've see of Jephthah so far, what character trait seems to be coming to the fore?

Jephthah seems to be something of a powerful public speaker. Already he has negotiated with the Gilead elders to ensure he will be made their leader if he has victory over the Ammonites. Now he gives a stirring speech to the Ammonites in which he recounts the history of Israel to show that Ammon's actions are wrong and publicly places the whole matter in the hand of the Lord who is the true Judge.

But we should remember he has a vested interest in the outcome of the upcoming battle - he will only be confirmed as head if he has victory. Are Jephthah's words expressions of his commitment to God and his people, or are they a clever attempt to force God's hand? Or a bit of both? And remember, Jephthah wasn't raised up by God like the previous judges- he is a human choice. What is God's view of Jephthah?

### **Read Judges 11:29-40**

10. How do we know God is now with Jephthah? (see 3:10; 6:34).

11. Why does he make this vow? (v30). Does he need to? What does this say about Jephthah?

12. Before even knowing the outcome, what's your reaction to the vow that Jephthah makes?

13. How do you feel about this whole episode?

Notice the words in v35. Jephthah is distressed but who does he seem sorry for? Where are the words of comfort for his doomed daughter? It's this poor young girl who we feel such distress for, and it's she who seems to act in such a pure and righteous way.

## Read Judges 12:1-7

14. How does Jephthah's approach to the upset tribe of Ephraim compare with Gideon's approach? (see 8:1-3)

15. The fact that Jephthah reacts the way he does and slaughters the Ephraimites at the fords, has echoes of what Ehud did, 3:26-39—but what's the tragedy this time?

16. Why is this final episode of the Jephthah story a disturbing one for Israel?

Throughout the book of Judges, there have been signs that all is not well between the tribes of Israel. We saw it first during the time of Deborah and Barak (5:15-18). Again we saw it with Gideon when he narrowly avoided a war with Ephraim (8:1-3). But unlike Gideon, Jephthah does not even try diplomacy, despite the fact that he is very good with words. He heads straight into a bloody civil war. And notice that Jephthah doesn't even identify himself as being an Israelite—it's all about his own interests as the head of Gilead (12:2).

Manipulation is at the centre of this story. Israel is trying to manipulate God with their pseudo-repentance. But then they get the judge they deserve. And Jephthah not only manipulates the Israelites to become their king, he also tries to manipulate God. The tragic ending to Jephthah's attempt to manipulate God with his vow is a warning about trying to bargain with God, however religious a bargain it may seem.

17. In our relationship with God, do we have anything to bargain with? How should we relate to God?

18. What kind of bargains are you tempted to try and make with God?

19. How can religious people today try and manipulate God? (for an example, see Acts 19:13-17).