



## **THE 12 APOSTLES BIBLE STUDY SERIES**

### **Jephthah by brother Ed**

#### **Introduction**

Negotiation is a good strategy for peace making.

In most of his conflicts, Jephthah's first move was to talk. In the war with the Ammonites, his strategy was negotiation. He clarified the issues so that everyone knew the cause of the conflict. His opponent's response determined his next action.

Jephthah is a great role model for a polarized world.

Facts:

- Where: Gilead
- Occupations: Warrior, judge

#### **Outline**

*Early Life (Jdg\_11:1-3)*

*Wise Negotiation of Gilead's Elders (Jdg\_11:4-11)*

*Sovereign Control of Israel's History (Jdg\_11:12-28)*

*Overactive Doubt Brings Tragedy (Jdg\_11:29-40)*

*Inactive Criticism Brings Tragedy (Jdg\_12:1-7)*

*Divinely Active Faithfulness Brings Stability (Jdg\_12:8-15)*

*Final Thoughts*



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### Early Life (Jdg\_11:1-3)

*Jdg 11:1-3 Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. His father was Gilead; his mother was a prostitute. (2) Gilead's wife also bore him sons, and when they were grown up, they drove Jephthah away. "You are not going to get any inheritance in our family," they said, "because you are the son of another woman." (3) So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the land of Tob, where a gang of scoundrels gathered around him and followed him.*

### Quiz

1. Was Jephthah a likely material to become a leader? Why (Jdg 11:1-3)
2. What was God criteria for selecting His servants?

### Applications

1. How has Jephthah's story encouraged and inspired you to serve?

*No person should be blamed for the circumstances surrounding his or her birth. Why permit the things you cannot control to burden your life? Learn to accept them, and the Lord will work out His purposes in His own time (Ps. 139:13-16). Opposition will one day give way to opportunity.*



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### Wise Negotiation of Gilead's Elders (Jdg\_11:4-11)

*Jdg 11:4-11 Some time later, when the Ammonites were fighting against Israel, (5) the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. (6) "Come," they said, "be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites." (7) Jephthah said to them, "Didn't you hate me and drive me from my father's house? Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?" (8) The elders of Gilead said to him, "Nevertheless, we are turning to you now; come with us to fight the Ammonites, and you will be head over all of us who live in Gilead." (9) Jephthah answered, "Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the LORD gives them to me--will I really be your head?" (10) The elders of Gilead replied, "The LORD is our witness; we will certainly do as you say." (11) So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them. And he repeated all his words before the LORD in Mizpah.*

#### Quiz

1. What position did the smooth-talking politicians offered Jephthah? (Jdg 11:6-7)
2. How did Jephthah negotiate the counteroffer? (Jdg 11:8-9)
3. What did the Gilead and Jephthah do to seal the deal?

#### Applications

1. Like Jephthah, the Lord's unwilling to be used by Israel, on their terms. Who is God to you- a mere commander or the head of all?

*In our relationship with God, He must have no rivals in our affections. In the case of Jephthah, they have to offer him a much more extended authority, as "head over all the inhabitants of Gilead". There can be no substitute for obedience. It is the height of spiritual folly to open the lionmouth, insert one's head, and then pray fervently to the Lord that it will not be bitten off! God's providence does not remove human responsibility, but works through it.*



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### Sovereign Control of Israel's History (Jdg\_11:12-28)

*Jdg 11:12-28 Then Jephthah sent messengers to the Ammonite king with the question: "What do you have against me that you have attacked my country?" (13) The king of the Ammonites answered Jephthah's messengers, "When Israel came up out of Egypt, they took away my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, all the way to the Jordan. Now give it back peaceably." (14) Jephthah sent back messengers to the Ammonite king, (15) saying: "This is what Jephthah says: Israel did not take the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites. (16) But when they came up out of Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and on to Kadesh. (17) Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, 'Give us permission to go through your country,' but the king of Edom would not listen. They sent also to the king of Moab, and he refused. So Israel stayed at Kadesh. (18) "Next they traveled through the wilderness, skirted the lands of Edom and Moab, passed along the eastern side of the country of Moab, and camped on the other side of the Arnon. They did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was its border. (19) "Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon, and said to him, 'Let us pass through your country to our own place.' (20) Sihon, however, did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. He mustered all his troops and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel. (21) "Then the LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and his whole army into Israel's hands, and they defeated them. Israel took over all the land of the Amorites who lived in that country, (22) capturing all of it from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the desert to the Jordan. (23) "Now since the LORD, the God of Israel, has driven the Amorites out before his people Israel, what right have you to take it over? (24) Will you not take what your god Chemosh gives you? Likewise, whatever the LORD our God has given us, we will possess. (25) Are you any better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever quarrel with Israel or fight with them? (26) For three hundred years Israel occupied Heshbon, Aroer, the surrounding settlements and all the towns along the Arnon. Why didn't you retake them during that time? (27) I have not wronged you, but you are doing me wrong by waging war against me. Let the LORD, the Judge, decide the dispute this day between the Israelites and the Ammonites." (28) The king of Ammon, however, paid no attention to the message Jephthah sent him.*

#### Quiz

1. How did Jephthah initiate the campaign against the Ammonites? (Jdg 11:12-13)
2. What was Jephthah's first strategy in negotiation? (Jdg 11:14-18)
3. What ground rule did Jephthah establish? (Jdg 11:19-21)
4. What was the third argument presented by Jephthah? (Jdg 11:22-28)

#### Applications

1. Do you see all political disputes or military engagements as a conflict between the two nations' gods? If not, why not?

*We live in a world where the two systems, one with and one without God, are still in conflict. Trust in a sovereign God is one characteristic mark of believers. We may not understand why things happen as they do. It would not necessarily help us to cope if we did. We come back often to the recognition of Deu\_29:29 that "the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."*



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### *Overactive Doubt Brings Tragedy (Jdg\_11:29-40)*

*Jdg 11:29-40 Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. (30) And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, (31) whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering." (32) Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands. (33) He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon. (34) When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. (35) When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break." (36) "My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites. (37) But grant me this one request," she said. "Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry." (38) "You may go," he said. And he let her go for two months. She and her friends went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. (39) After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin. From this comes the Israelite tradition (40) that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.*

### Quiz

1. Who did Jephthah reply on for victory? Why (Jdg 11:29)
2. What offer did Jephthah make to God? Why? (Jdg 11:30-31)
3. What was the result? (Jdg 11:31-40)

### Applications

1. Have you bargained with God before when you are in a tight spot? Share with the group.

***We Christians say we believe in God's unconditional love, but when we get into a tight scrape, our lives betray us. We begin to bargain with God, because we don't really trust Him.***



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### *Inactive Criticism Brings Tragedy (Jdg\_12:1-7)*

*Jdg 12:1-7 The Ephraimite forces were called out, and they crossed over to Zaphon. They said to Jephthah, "Why did you go to fight the Ammonites without calling us to go with you? We're going to burn down your house over your head." (2) Jephthah answered, "I and my people were engaged in a great struggle with the Ammonites, and although I called, you didn't save me out of their hands. (3) When I saw that you wouldn't help, I took my life in my hands and crossed over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave me the victory over them. Now why have you come up today to fight me?" (4) Jephthah then called together the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. The Gileadites struck them down because the Ephraimites had said, "You Gileadites are renegades from Ephraim and Manasseh." (5) The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead asked him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he replied, "No," (6) they said, "All right, say 'Shibboleth.'" If he said, "Sibboleth," because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed at that time. (7) Jephthah led Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in a town in Gilead.*

### Quiz

1. What was the Ephraimites complaining about? (Jdg 11:1)
2. How did Jephthah's reply? (Jdg 11:2-3)
3. What did Jephthah do? (Jdg 11:4-6)

### Applications

1. What unbelief has hindered your obedience towards God's Will? .

*The faithlessness of the Ephraimites led them to the choice not to be involved in what God was doing.*



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### *Divinely Active Faithfulness Brings Stability (Jdg\_12:8-15)*

*Jdg 12:8-15 After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem led Israel. (9) He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He gave his daughters away in marriage to those outside his clan, and for his sons he brought in thirty young women as wives from outside his clan. Ibzan led Israel seven years. (10) Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem. (11) After him, Elon the Zebulunite led Israel ten years. (12) Then Elon died and was buried in Aijalon in the land of Zebulun. (13) After him, Abdon son of Hillel, from Pirathon, led Israel. (14) He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys. He led Israel eight years. (15) Then Abdon son of Hillel died and was buried at Pirathon in Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.*

#### Quiz

1. How has God blessed Jephthah's descendants?

#### Applications

1. How do you respond to God's faithfulness? .

*There is almost an air of normality about the second half of the chapter, described by one commentator as "a chronicle of trivialities." But if that is so, it is a lull before the storm. It reminds us, however, that there are periods in God's purposes when comparatively little seems to be happening—the day of small things.*



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### *Final Thoughts*

The story of Jephthah and his daughter almost seems to underline his disqualification from fatherhood because of the fatal flaws in his character. In a sense, his action in rendering to God a needless vow reflected the nation's wrong attitude and relationship toward Yahweh. They thought of Him too much in terms of the pagan deities around them. They imagined that He too could be bribed or appeased. They forgot the uniqueness of His holiness, the majesty of His creatorial power, and the sheer "aloneness" of the one true and living God. Jephthah, like his contemporaries, erred in reducing God to pocket-size dimensions.





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### **Study Guide – Jephthah**

#### **Wise Negotiation of Gilead's Elders (Jdg\_11:4-11)**

Quiz 2. For Jephthah, victory over the Ammonites will be divine endorsement of his right to rule. For the elders, the Lord is a silent witness to their new leader's commitment.

#### **Sovereign Control of Israel's History (Jdg\_11:12-28)**

Quiz 1 Jephthah begins his campaign not by mobilizing the army, but in negotiation with the enemy. By seizing the initiative, he is able to occupy a position of moral strength.

Quiz 2. His first strategy is to establish the facts. This is plain common sense, but amazingly it is often ignored in all sorts of disputes. Jephthah denies the charge that Israel had taken the land of Moab or of the Ammonites when the nation came out of Egypt. On the contrary, they had been careful to ask for permission even to travel through.

Quiz 3. Having stated the facts, Jephthah next takes care to establish the ground rules. He reminds the enemy that Balak, king of Moab, had not questioned Israel's right to the land she had conquered, although he had resisted Israel's advance and tried to hire the prophet Balaam to curse the nation. Why then should the king of Ammon raise the matter three hundred years later when he could establish no right to the disputed territory anyway? Clearly, the reality was that Ammon was in an expansionist phase, had mopped up Moab, and was now ambitious to add Israel to her empire.

Quiz 4. In Jephthah's view there is a third clinching argument, which involves the recognition of God's sovereignty. Why had Israel originally taken the land? The answer is made abundantly plain. Yahweh, God of Israel, had given it to His people (Jdg\_11:21). He drove out the Amorites (Jdg\_11:23). So Jephthah does not hesitate to lift the struggle above the level of political dispute or military engagement to a conflict between the two nations' gods.

#### **Overactive Doubt Brings Tragedy (Jdg\_11:29-40)**

Quiz 2. Jephthah knew that God's law prohibited human sacrifices, and certainly the Lord would not have given victory on the basis of such an offer. Some say that Jephthah's daughter was dedicated to serve the Lord at the tabernacle and therefore remained unmarried. As a result, Jephthah had no descendants to carry on his great name. If she had been sacrificed, it is not likely that the maidens would have been allowed to commemorate the event annually, for that would have been imitating the heathen around them.